

THE FITZROY EDITION

Hodge and his Masters

I

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THE STRANGE DEATH OF LIBERAL ENGLAND
George Dangerfield

AUTOBIOGRAPHY
Joseph Arch

HODGE AND HIS MASTERS
Richard Jefferies

REALITIES OF IRISH LIFE
W. Steuart Trench

STRUGGLES AND TRIUMPHS
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Tom Mann

SEVENTY YEARS A SHOWMAN
'Lord' George Sanger

Richard Jefferies

Hodge and his Masters

VOLUME ONE

Introduction by
RAYMOND WILLIAMS

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INTRODUCTION

RICHARD JEFFERIES was thirty when he wrote for a London newspaper, *The Standard*, the articles which make up the present book, first collected and published by Smith, Elder in 1880. Jefferies had been born on 6 November 1848, at Coate, near Swindon. His great-grandfather was a miller and baker in Swindon, and in 1800 bought some forty acres of land two or three miles out of town. Richard's grandfather took over management of the Swindon business in 1816, moving there from London. In 1822 a house was built at Coate, and for some years remained empty. As Richard's father wrote later: 'I was the first that lived in it, after leaving school at 14 – my Eldest Sister as Housekeeper and Dairy Maid managed it for Father'. Now that, through Jefferies' writing, Coate is famous – he upgraded it to Coate Farm when he wrote on the situation in agriculture to *The Times* in 1872 – it is worth recalling his father's description of it, in a late letter: 'how he could think of describing Coate as such a pleasant place and deceive so I could not imagine, in fact nothing scarcely he mentions is in Coate proper only the proper one was not a pleasant one Snodshill was the name on my Waggon and cart, he styled it Coate Farm it was not worthy of the name of Farm it was not Forty Acres of Land'. Fourteen acres of this had to go in the late 1860s, and in 1878, a few months before Jefferies was beginning *Hodge and his Masters*, his father sold up and moved to Bath, where he became an odd-job gardener.

When Richard Jefferies was four, he was sent to live with an aunt, in Sydenham. He stayed there until he was nine, revisiting Coate for a month's annual holiday. Back with his parents, he was sent to small private schools in Swindon. At sixteen, with a cousin, he ran away from home, got to France for a week, and was eventually caught by the police in Liverpool and sent back to Swindon. His first job was as a reporter on the *North Wiltshire Herald*, a new Conservative paper in Swindon, irregularly from 1866 to 1868, and he worked later on the *Wiltshire and Gloucestershire Standard*, irregularly until 1873. In 1874 he married the daughter of a farming neighbour, and moved into Swindon. His letters to *The Times*,

in 1872, had brought him wider opportunities as a writer of articles on farming and country life, and for most of 1875 he lived in Surbiton with the aunt with whom he had spent his early childhood. He moved his own family to Surbiton in 1877, and it was from there that *Hodge and His Masters* was written. In the seventies, in addition to many articles, he published three novels, *The Scarlet Shawl*, *Restless Human Hearts*, and *World's End*, and three country books, *The Gamekeeper at Home*, *Wild Life in a Southern County*, and *The Amateur Poacher*. The writing of *Hodge* came at a time when he was becoming reasonably established as a writer, after years of poverty and uncertainty. In the eighties, he continued writing articles, and published a whole series of books: *Wood Magic* and *Bevis*; *Nature near London*, *The Life of the Fields*, *The Open Air*; *Greene Ferne Farm*, *The Dewy Morn*, *After London*, *Amaryllis at the Fair*, *The Story of My Heart*. But his youth had been interrupted by illness, and from the early 1880s this was increasingly serious. He moved to Sussex and died at Goring on 14 August, 1887. The cause of death was recorded as 'chronic fibroid phthisis - exhaustion'. He was thirty-eight.

It is worth recalling both the social and the personal history of Jefferies, when we have read *Hodge and his Masters*. As a contribution to the social history of rural England it belongs, in a high place, with such classics as William Cobbett's *Rural Rides*, Thomas Bewick's *Memoir*, Somerville's *Whistler at the Plough*, and, in our own day, M. K. Ashby's *Joseph Ashby of Tysoe*. Yet it is social history which is both avowedly and unavowedly a work of art; written, as has significantly often been the case, by a man whose relationships to his material are in some ways marginal and paradoxical. There is a myth of Jefferies, which the books themselves do something to create: the lifelong countryman, son of generations of yeomen farmers, steeped in what is now conventionally called 'the moral importance of the underlying, ageless, agricultural pattern'. The reality is different and more interesting. The suburban writer and journalist, recreating the country of his adolescence on the struggling smallholding; the sick man, perhaps the most brilliant imaginative observer of trees and animals and flowers and weather in his century, going on looking and writing until he said at the end: 'nothing for man in nature . . . unless he has the Beyond', or, in his last essay, 'perhaps in course of time I shall find

out also, when I pass away physically, that as a matter of fact there never was any earth'; the ambitious, hardworking young man, writing in the interest of landed proprietors and employers, finding 'the statements made by "The Son of a Wiltshire Labourer" . . . such as I feel bound to resent on the part of the farmers of this county', from 'Coate Farm', Swindon.

The social reality is equally significant. What he saw, and what he recorded, of the social life of rural England was very far from 'ageless'. This is the countryside of North Wiltshire and South Gloucestershire, where a portable threshing-machine had been invented and where rioting labourers, soon after Jefferies' father moved to Coate, had fought pitched battles with the local Yeomanry; where there was no longer a peasantry, in any classical sense, but a system of capitalist farming, closely tied to the fluctuations of national and international trade; where at Swindon, just down the road, a railway workshop was being built, and the town expanded rapidly as a junction and repair centre; where, in Jefferies' time as a young reporter, the long depression of agriculture was beginning. As he himself wrote:

The changes which have been crowded into the last half-century have been so numerous and so important that it would be almost reasonable to suppose the limit had been reached for the present, and that the next few generations would be sufficiently occupied in assimilating themselves to the new conditions of existence. But so far from this being the case, all the facts of the hour point irresistibly to the conclusion that the era of development has but just commenced.

The life Jefferies observed, then, was not ageless, and he himself was not settled in it. The greater part of the material of *Hodge and his Masters* was absorbed when Jefferies was a young reporter on the *Wiltshire and Gloucestershire Standard* in the early 1870s: the 'old newspaper', in chapter three of the second volume, is that one, just as 'Fleeceborough' is Cirencester and 'The Juke's Country' around Badminton. He was not considered a particularly good reporter, but then he was observing on his own account, following his own interests. He ranged from the precise observation of an effect of light on landscape, as in the brilliant description near the beginning of 'Hodge's Fields', through such incidents as taking

the milk to the train in 'Haymaking' or the description of a country station in 'Mademoiselle, the Governess', on through such collected observations, establishing the pattern of an institution, as in 'The Solicitor' or 'The Bank', to a kind of composed observation, moving between characters and a way of life, as in 'Leaving his Farm', 'Going Downhill', 'An Ambitious Squire', or 'Hodge's Last Masters'. In each of these kinds his genius is evident, and in the last, particularly, he is working essentially as a novelist. It is characteristic that he was prepared to have his *Amaryllis at the Fair* published either as 'a novel' or as 'scenes of country life', and we can say that what, in his explicit fiction, he added to the imaginative strength, the deeply perceived connections between character and society and physical environment, of his essays and sketches, bears witness as much to the weakness of the form of the novel of his day (a weakness from which a greater genius, Thomas Hardy, also suffered: a difficulty of including labour and working relations in the ordinary fictional structure) as to a personal weakness, in a certain proneness to a weak, late, pre-Raphaelite idealisation and romanticism. As we read the first sentence of *Hodge and his Masters*, at the doorway of 'the Jason Inn at Woolbury', it is to the strengths of the tradition of the realist novel that we feel we are being introduced.

The limits appear, in our subsequent reading, and one of them, especially, needs definition. For all his claims of a 'fair and impartial spirit', Jefferies was no neutral observer. He is at times the committed writer, who has known in depth the whole crisis of this rural civilization and whose attachments are firm and clear. But he is also at times the class reporter or even the party hack, from the unpleasant whimsical fawning of the last pages of 'Fleeceborough' to the sour rant at the end of 'A Winter's Morning' or the correspondence-column stereotypes of 'The Cottage Girls'. At times, clearly, he wrote what his readers wanted to hear, during a social crisis, just as his 'Times' letters had been an intervention against Joseph Arch and the new Agricultural Labourers' Union. What his readers saw, and what at times he saw himself, was not men and women, marked (as he stressed of farmers) by 'individuality of character', but the gross figure, the abstraction, of Labour or Hodge. I read these pages with the advantage of having heard from the lips of some of these men and women the detailed experience

of farm labouring at this time: my grandparents were going out to the cattle and the hedging and the stonepicking in the years Jefferies was writing, only thirty or forty miles from his fields. As those words and these pages come together, I see Jefferies in the full ambiguity of his social position: son of a struggling small-holder who in fact sold up and became a day-labourer, a position and a fear which so often produce the upward fawning and the downward massing and blackening which in towns would be called petty-bourgeois. But I see also, as in Lawrence, the gifted young man who is writing his way out of this whole situation, necessarily through readers who are placed socially above him, and on whom the complex pressures are severe and lasting. It is right to make the point in this way, while also directing the reader to Jefferies' other essays, written significantly later, when he was both established and had got thoroughly away, in which his accounts of class relationships in the villages, and the real situation of the labourer, are markedly different. Certainly we should go on to read not only *The Toilers of the Field* (1892) but also 'The Wiltshire Labourer', 'Unequal Agriculture', 'Village Organisation' and 'After the County Franchise' (in *The Hills and the Vale*, collected 1909), 'One of the New Voters' (in *The Open Air*, 1885), 'The Field Play' (in *The Life of the Fields*, 1884), and the remarkable 'Primrose Gold in Our Village' – an account of modern Conservatism – and 'Thoughts on the Labour Question' – with its near-marxist section on 'The Divine Right of Capital' (in *Field and Farm*, collected 1957). Yet, though we shall learn much from those essays, and gain Jefferies' own further thoughts on the social crisis, we shall inevitably also relate them back to *Hodge and his Masters*: to the sense of crisis already present in its title; to the clear descriptions which, as in Balzac's *The Peasants*, make the opinions separable and voluntary; but above all to the solidity, the magnificently composed detail, the living presence in words of this working country.

RAYMOND WILLIAMS

PREFACE TO THE ORIGINAL EDITION

THE papers of which these volumes are composed originally appeared in *The Standard*, and are now re-published by permission of the Editor.

In manners, mode of thought, and way of life, there is perhaps no class of the community less uniform than the agricultural. The diversities are so great as to amount to contradictions. Individuality of character is most marked, and, varying an old saw, it might be said, so many farmers so many minds.

Next to the tenants the landowners have felt the depression, to such a degree, in fact, that they should perhaps take the first place, having no one to allow them in turn a 20 per cent. reduction of their liabilities. It must be remembered that the landowner will not receive the fruits of returning prosperity when it comes for some time after they have reached the farmer. Two good seasons will be needed before the landowner begins to recoup.

Country towns are now so closely connected with agriculture that a description of the one would be incomplete without some mention of the other. The aggregate capital employed by the business men of these small towns must amount to an immense sum, and the depreciation of their investments is of more than local concern.

Although the labourer at the present moment is a little in the background, and has the best of the bargain, since wages have not much fallen, if at all; yet he will doubtless come to the front again. For as agriculture revives, and the sun shines, the organizations by which he is represented will naturally display fresh vigour.

But the rapid progress of education in the villages and outlying districts is the element which is most worthy of thoughtful consideration. On the one hand, it may perhaps cause a powerful demand for corresponding privileges; and on the other, counteract the tendency to unreasonable expectations. In any case, it is a fact that cannot be ignored. Meantime, all I claim for the following sketches is that they are written in a fair and impartial spirit.

RICHARD JEFFERIES

CHAPTER I

The Farmers' Parliament

THE doorway of the Jason Inn at Woolbury had nothing particular to distinguish it from the other doorways of the same extremely narrow street. There was no porch, nor could there possibly be one, for an ordinary porch would reach half across the roadway. There were no steps to go up, there was no entrance hall, no space specially provided for crowds of visitors; simply nothing but an ordinary street-door opening directly on the street, and very little, if any, broader or higher than those of the private houses adjacent. There was not even the usual covered way or archway leading into the courtyard behind, so often found at old country inns; the approach to the stables and coach-houses was through a separate and even more narrow and winding street, necessitating a detour of some quarter of a mile. The dead, dull wall was worn smooth in places by the involuntary rubbings it had received from the shoulders of foot-passengers thrust rudely against it as the market-people came pouring in or out, or both together.

Had the spot been in the most crowded district of the busiest part of the metropolis, where every inch of ground is worth an enormous sum, the buildings could not have been more jammed together, nor the inconvenience greater. Yet the little town was in the very midst of one of the most purely agricultural counties, where land, to all appearance, was plentiful, and where there was ample room and 'verge enough' to build fifty such places. The pavement in front of the inn was barely eighteen inches wide; two persons could not pass each other on it, nor walk abreast. If a cart came along the roadway, and a trap had to go by it, the foot-passengers had to squeeze up against the wall, lest the box of the wheel projecting over the kerb should push them down. If a great waggon came loaded with wool, the chances were whether a carriage could pass it or not; as for a waggon-load of straw that

projected from the sides, nothing could get by, but all must wait – coroneted panel or plain four-wheel – till the huge mass had rumbled and jolted into the more open market-place.

But hard, indeed, must have been the flagstones to withstand the wear and tear of the endless iron-shod shoes that tramped to and fro those mere ribbons of pavements. For, besides the through traffic out from the market-place to the broad macadamized road that had taken the place and the route of an ancient Roman road, there were the customers to the shops that lined each side of the street. Into some of these you stepped from the pavement down, as it were, into a cave, the level of the shop being eight or ten inches below the street, while the first floor projected over the pavement quite to the edge of the kerb. To enter these shops it was necessary to stoop, and when you were inside there was barely room to turn around. Other shops were, indeed, level with the street; but you have to be careful, because the threshold was not flush with the pavement, but rose a couple of inches and then fell again, a very trap to the toe of the unwary. Many had no glass at all, but were open, like a butcher's or fishmonger's. Those that had glass were restricted for space that, rich as they might be within in the good things of the earth, they could make no 'display'. All the genius of a West-end shopman could not have made an artistic arrangement in that narrow space and in that bad light; for, though so small below, the houses rose high, and the street being so narrow the sunshine rarely penetrated into it.

But mean as a metropolitan shopman might have thought the spot, the business done there was large, and, more than that, it was genuine. The trade of a country market-town, especially when that market town like Woolbury, dates from the earliest days of English history, is hereditary. It flows to the same store and to the same shop year after year, generation after generation, century after century. The farmer who walks into the saddler's here goes in because his father went there before him. His father went in because his father dealt there, and so on farther back than memory can trace. It might almost be said that whole villages go to particular shops. You may see the agricultural labourers' wives, for instance, on a Saturday leave the village in a bevy of ten or a dozen, and all march in to the same tradesman. Of course in these latter days speculative men and 'co-operative' prices,

industriously placarded, have sapped and undermined this old-fashioned system. Yet even now it retains sufficient hold to be a marked feature of country life. To the through traffic, therefore, had to be added the steady flow of customers to the shops.

On a market-day like this there is, of course, the incessant entry and exit of carts, waggons, traps, gigs, four-wheels, and a large number of private carriages. The number of private carriages is, indeed, very remarkable, as also the succession of gentlemen on thoroughbred horses – a proof of the number of resident gentry in the neighbourhood, and of its general prosperity. Cart-horses furbished up for sale, with straw-bound tails and glistening skins; 'baaing' flocks of sheep; squeaking pigs; bullocks with their heads held ominously low, some going, some returning, from the auction yard; shouting drovers; lads rushing hither and thither; dogs barking; everything and everybody crushing, jostling, pushing through the narrow street. An old shepherd, who has done his master's business, comes along the pavement, trudging thoughtful and slow, with ashen staff. One hand is in his pocket, the elbow of the arm projecting; he is feeling a fourpenny-piece, and deliberating at which 'tap' he shall spend it. He fills up the entire pavement, and stolidly plods on, turning ladies and all into the roadway; not from intentional rudeness, but from sheer inability to perceive that he is causing inconvenience.

Unless you know the exact spot it is difficult in all this crowd and pushing, with a nervous dread of being gored from behind by a bull, or thrown off your feet by a sudden charge of sheep, to discover the door of the Jason Inn. That door has been open every legitimate and lawful hour this hundred years; but you will very likely be carried past it and have to struggle back. Then it is not easy to enter, for half a dozen stalwart farmers and farmers' sons are coming out; while two young fellows stand just inside, close to the sliding bar-window, blocking up the passage, to exchange occasional nods and smiles with the barmaid. However, by degrees you shuffle along the sanded passage, and past the door of the bar, which is full of farmers as thick as they can stand, or sit. The rattle of glasses, the chink of spoons, the hum of voices, the stamping of feet, the calls and orders, and sounds of laughter, mingle in confusion. Cigar-smoke and the steam from the glasses fill the room –

all too small – with a thick white mist, through which rubicund faces dimly shine like the red sun through a fog.

Some at the table are struggling to write cheques, with continual jogs at the elbow, with ink that will not flow, pens that scratch and splutter, blotting-paper that smudges and blots. Some are examining cards of an auction, and discussing the prices which they have marked in the margin in pencil. The good-humoured uproar is beyond description, and is increased by more farmers forcing their way in from the rear, where are their horses or traps – by farmers eagerly inquiring for dealers and friends, and by messengers from the shops loaded with parcels to place in the customer's vehicle.

At last you get beyond the bar-room door and reach the end of the passage, where is a wide staircase, and at the foot a tall eight-day clock. A maid-servant comes tripping down, and in answer to inquiry replies that that is the way up, and the room is ready, but she adds with a smile that there is no one there yet. It is three-quarters of an hour after the time fixed for the reading of a most important paper before a meeting specially convened, before the assembled Parliament of Hodge's masters, and you thought you would be too late. A glance at the staircase proves the truth of the maid's story. It has no carpet, but it is white as well-scrubbed wood could well be. There is no stain, no dust, no foot-mark on it; no heavy shoe that has been tramping about in the mud has been up there. But it is necessary to go on or go back, and of the two the first is the lesser evil.

The staircase is guarded by carved bannisters, and after going up two flights you enter a large and vacant apartment prepared for the meeting of the farmers' club. At the farther end is a small mahogany table, with an armchair for the president, paper, pens, ink, blotting-paper, and a wax candle and matches, in case he should want a light. Two less dignified chairs are for the secretary (whose box, containing the club records, books of reference, etc., is on the table), and for the secretary's clerk. Rows of plain chairs stretch across the room, rank after rank, these are for the audience. And last of all are two long forms as if for Hodge, if Hodge chooses to come.

A gleam of the afternoon sun – as the clouds part awhile – attracts one naturally to the window. The thickness of the wall in

which it is placed must be some two or three feet, so that there is a recess on which to put your arms, if you do not mind the dust, and look out. The window is half open, and the sounds of the street come up, 'baaing' and bellowing and squeaking, the roll of wheels, the tramp of feet, and, more distant, the shouting of an auctioneer in the market-place, whose stentorian tones come round the corner as he puts up rickcloths for sale. Noise of man and animal below; above, here in the chamber of science, vacancy and silence. Looking upward, a narrow streak of blue sky can be seen above the ancient house across the way.

After awhile there comes the mellow sound of bells from the church which is near by, though out of sight; bells with a soft, old-world tone; bells that chime slowly and succeed each other without haste, ringing forth a holy melody composed centuries ago. It is as well to pause a minute and listen to their voice, even in this railroad age of hurry. Over the busy market-place the notes go forth, and presently the hum comes back and dwells in the recess of the window. It is a full hour after the time fixed, and now at last, as the carillon finishes, there are sounds of heavy boots upon the staircase. Three or four farmers gather on the landing; they converse together just outside. The secretary's clerk comes, and walks to the table; more farmers, who, now they have company, boldly enter and take seats; still more farmers; the secretary arrives; finally the president appears, and with him the lecturer. There is a hum of greeting; the minutes are read; the president introduces the professor, and the latter stands forth to read his paper – 'Science, the Remedy for Agricultural Depression.'

Farmers, he pointed out, had themselves only to blame for the present period of distress. For many years past science had been like the voice crying in the wilderness, and few, a very few only, had listened. Men had, indeed, come to the clubs; but they had gone away home again, and, as the swine of the proverb, returned to their wallowing in the mire. One blade of grass still grew where two or even three might be grown; he questioned whether farmers had any real desire to grow the extra blades. If they did, they had merely to employ the means provided for them. Everything had been literally put into their hands; but what was the result? Why, nothing – in point of fact, nothing. The country at large was still undrained. The very ABC of progress had been neglected. He

should be afraid to say what proportion of the land was yet undrained, for he should be contradicted, called ill names, and cried down. But if they would look around them they could see for themselves. They would see meadows full of rank, coarse grass in the furrows, which neither horse nor cattle would touch. They would see in the wheat-fields patches of the crop sickly, weak, feeble, and altogether poor; that was where the water had stood and destroyed the natural power of the seed. The same cause gave origin to that mass of weeds which was the standing disgrace of arable districts.

But men shut their eyes wilfully to these plain facts, and cried out that the rain had ruined them. It was not the rain – it was their own intense dislike of making any improvement. The *vis inertiae* of the agricultural class was beyond the limit of language to describe. Why, if the land had been drained the rain would have done comparatively little damage, and thus they would have been independent of the seasons. Look, again, at the hay crop; how many thousand tons of hay had been wasted because men would not believe that anything would answer which had not been done by their forefathers! The hay might have been saved by three distinct methods. The grass might have been piled against hurdles, or light framework and so dried by the wind; it might have been pitted in the earth and preserved still green; or it might have been dried by machinery and the hot blast. A gentleman had invented a machine, the utility of which had been demonstrated beyond all doubt. But no; farmers folded their hands and watched their hay rotting.

As for the wheat crop, how could they expect a wheat crop? They had not cleaned the soil – there were horse-hoes, and every species of contrivances for the purpose; but they would not use them. They had not ploughed deeply: they had merely scratched the surface as if with a pin. How could the thin upper crust of the earth – the mere rind three inches thick – be expected to yield crop after crop for a hundred years? Deep ploughing could only be done by steam: how many farmers possessed or used steam-ploughs? Why, there were whole districts where such a thing was unknown. They had neglected to manure the soil; to restore to it the chemical constituents of the crops. But to speak upon artificial manure was enough to drive any man who had the power of thought

into temporary insanity. It was so utterly dispiriting to see men positively turning away from the means of obtaining good crops, and then crying out that they were ruined. With drains, steam-ploughs, and artificial manure, a farmer might defy the weather.

Of course, continued the professor, it was assumed that the farmer had good substantial buildings and sufficient capital. The first he could get if he chose; and without the second, without capital, he had no business to be farming at all. He was simply stopping the road of a better man, and the sooner he was driven out of the way the better. The neglect of machinery was most disheartening. A farmer bought one machine, perhaps a reaping-machine, and then because that solitary article did not immediately make his fortune he declared that machinery was useless. Could the force of folly farther go? With machinery they could do just as they liked. They could compel the earth to yield, and smile at the most tropical rain, or the most continuous drought. If only the voice of science had been listened to, there would have been no depression at all. Even now it was not too late.

Those who were wise would at once set to work to drain, to purchase artificial manure, and set up steam-power, and thereby to provide themselves with the means of stemming the tide of depression. By these means they could maintain a head of stock that would be more than double what was now kept upon equal acreage. He knew full well one of the objections that would be made against these statements. It would be said that certain individuals had done all this, had deep ploughed, had manured, had kept a great head of valuable stock, had used every resource, and yet had suffered. This was true. He deeply regretted to say it was true.

But why had they suffered? Not because of the steam, the machinery, the artificial manure, the improvements they had set on foot; but because of the folly of their neighbours, of the agricultural class generally. The great mass of farmers had made no improvements; and, when the time of distress came, they were beaten down at every point. It was through these men and their failures that the price of stock and of produce fell, and that so much stress was put upon the said individuals through no fault of their own. He would go further, and he would say that had it not been for the noble efforts of such individuals – the pioneers of agriculture and its main props and stays – the condition of farming would

have been simply fifty times worse than it was. They, and they alone, had enabled it to bear up so long against calamity. They had resources; the agricultural class, as a rule, had none. Those resources were the manure they had put into the soil, the deep ploughing they had accomplished, the great head of stock they had got together, and so on. These enabled them to weather the storm.

The cry for a reduction of rent was an irresistible proof of what he had put forth – that it was the farmers themselves who were to blame. This cry was a confession of their own incompetency. If you analysed it – if you traced the general cry home to particular people – you always found that those people were incapables. The fact was, farming, as a rule, was conducted on the hand-to-mouth principle, and the least stress or strain caused an outcry. He must be forgiven if he seemed to speak with unusual acerbity. He intended no offence. But it was his duty. In such a condition of things it would be folly to mince matters, to speak softly while everything was going to pieces. He repeated, once for all, it was their own fault. Science could supply the remedy and science alone; if they would not call in the aid of science they must suffer, and their privations must be upon their own heads. Science said, Drain, use artificial manure, plough deeply, keep the best breed of stock, put capital into the soil. Call science to their aid, and they might defy the seasons.

The professor sat down and thrust his hand through his hair. The president invited discussion. For some few minutes no one rose; presently, after a whispered conversation with his friend, an elderly farmer stood up from the forms at the very back of the room. He made no pretence to rounded periods, but spoke much better than might have been expected; he had a small piece of paper in his hand, on which he had made notes as the lecture proceeded.

He said that the lecturer had made out a very good case. He had proved to demonstration, in the most logical manner, that farmers were fools. Well, no doubt, all the world agreed with him, for everybody thought he could teach the farmer. The chemist, the grocer, the baker, the banker, the wine merchant, the lawyer, the doctor, the clerk, the mechanic, the merchant, the editor, the printer, the stockbroker, the colliery owner, the iron-master, the

clergyman, and the Methodist preacher, the very cabmen and railway porters, policemen, and no doubt the crossing-sweepers – to use an expressive Americanism, all the whole 'jing-bang' – could teach the ignorant jackass of a farmer.

Some few years ago he went into a draper's shop to bring home a parcel for his wife, and happened to enter into conversation with the draper himself. The draper said he was just going to sell off the business and go into dairy farming, which was the most paying thing out. That was just when there came over from America a patent machine for milking cows. The draper's idea was to milk all his cows by one of these articles, and so dispense with labour. He saw no more of him for a long time, but had heard that morning that he went into a dairy farm, got rid of all his money, and was now tramping the country as a pedlar with a pack at his back. Everybody thought he could teach the farmer till he tried farming himself, and then he found his mistake.

One remark of the lecturer, if he might venture to say so, seemed to him, a poor ignorant farmer of sixty years' standing, not only uncalled-for and priggish, but downright brutal. It was that the man with little capital ought to be driven out of farming, and the sooner he went to the wall the better. Now, how would all the grocers and other tradesmen whom he had just enumerated like to be told that if they had not got £10,000 each they ought to go at once to the workhouse! That would be a fine remedy for the depression of trade.

He always thought it was considered rather meritorious if a man with small capital, by hard work, honest dealing, and self-denial, managed to raise himself and get up in the world. But, oh no; nothing of the kind; the small man was the greatest sinner, and must be eradicated. Well, he did not hesitate to say that he had been a small man himself, and began in a very small way. Perhaps the lecturer would think him a small man still, as he was not a millionaire; but he could pay his way, which went for something in the eyes of old-fashioned people, and perhaps he had a pound or two over. He should say but one word more, for he was aware that there was a thunderstorm rapidly coming up, and he supposed science would not prevent him from getting a wet jacket. He should like to ask the lecturer if he could give the name of one single scientific farmer who had prospered?

Having said this much, the old gentleman put on his overcoat and bustled out of the room, and several others followed him, for the rain was already splashing against the window-panes. Others looked at their watches, and, seeing it was late, rose one by one and slipped off. The president asked if anyone would continue the discussion, and, as no one rose, invited the professor to reply.

The professor gathered his papers and stood up. Then there came a heavy rolling sound – the unmistakable boom of distant thunder. He said that the gentleman who had left so abruptly had quite misconstrued the tenour of his paper. So far from intending to describe farmers as lacking in intelligence, all he wished to show was that they did not use their natural abilities, from a certain traditionary bowing to custom. They did not like their neighbours to think that they were doing anything novel. No one respected the feelings that had grown up and strengthened from childhood, no one respected the habits of our ancestors, more than he did; no one knew better the solid virtues that adorned the homes of agriculturists. Far indeed, be it from him to say aught – (Boom! and the rattling of rain against the window) – aught that could – but he saw that gentlemen were anxious to get home, and would conclude.

A vote of thanks was hurriedly got over, and the assembly broke up and hastened down the staircase. They found the passage below so blocked with farmers who had crowded in out of the storm that movement was impossible. The place was darkened by the overhanging clouds, the atmosphere thick and close with the smoke and the crush. Flashes of brilliant lightning seemed to sweep down the narrow street, which ran like a brook with the storm-water; the thunder seemed to descend and shake the solid walls. 'It's rather hard on the professor,' said one farmer to another. 'What would science do in a thunderstorm!' He had hardly spoken when the hail suddenly came down, and the round white globules, rebounding from the pavement, rolled in at the open door. Each paused as he lifted his glass and thought of the harvest. As for Hodge, who was reaping, he had to take shelter how he might in the open fields. Boom! flash! boom! – splash and hiss, as the hail rushed along the narrow street.

CHAPTER II

Leaving his Farm

A LARGE white poster, fresh and glaring, is pasted on the wall of a barn that stands beside a narrow country lane. So plain an advertisement, without any colour or attempt at 'display', would be passed unnoticed among the endless devices on a town hoarding. There nothing can be hoped to be looked at unless novel and strange, or even incomprehensible. But here the oblong piece of black and white contrasts sufficiently in itself with red brick and dull brown wooden framing, with tall shadowy elms, and the glint of sunshine on the streamlet that flows with a ceaseless murmur across the hollow of the lane. Every man that comes along stays to read it.

The dealer in his trap – his name painted in white letters on the shaft – pulls up his quick pony, and sits askew on his seat to read. He has probably seen it before in the bar of the wayside inn, roughly hung on a nail, and swaying to and fro with the draught along the passage. He may have seen it, too, on the handing-post at the lonely cross-roads, stuck on in such a manner that, in order to peruse it, it is necessary to walk around the post. The same formal announcement appears also in the local weekly papers – there are at least two now in the smallest place – and he has read it there. Yet he pauses to glance at it again, for the country mind requires reiteration before it can thoroughly grasp and realize the simplest fact. The poster must be read and re-read, and the printer's name observed and commented on, or, if handled, the thickness of the paper felt between thumb and finger. After a month or two of this process people at last begin to accept it as a reality, like cattle or trees – something substantial, and not mere words.

The carter, with his waggon, if he be an elderly man, cries 'Whoa!' and, standing close to the wall, points to each letter with the top of his whip – where it bends – and so spells out 'Sale by Auction'. If he be a young man he looks up at it as the heavy

waggon rumbles by, turns his back, and goes on with utter indifference.

The old men, working so many years on a single farm, and whose minds were formed in days when a change of tenancy happened once in half a century, have so identified themselves with the order of things in the parish that it seems to personally affect them when a farmer leaves his place. But young Hodge cares nothing about his master, or his fellow's master. Whether they go or stay, prosperous or decaying, it matters nothing to him. He takes good wages, and can jingle some small silver in his pocket when he comes to the tavern a mile or so ahead; so 'gee-up' and let us get there as rapidly as possible.

An hour later a farmer passes on horseback; his horse all too broad for his short legs that stick out at the side and show some inches of stocking between the bottom of his trousers and his boots. A sturdy, thick-set man, with a wide face, brickdust colour, fringed with close-cut red whiskers, and a chest so broad – he seems compelled to wear his coat unbuttoned. He pulls off his hat and wipes his partly bald head with a coloured handkerchief, stares at the poster a few minutes, and walks his horse away, evidently in deep thought. Two boys – cottagers' children – come home from school; they look around to see that no one observes, and then throw flints at the paper till the sound of footsteps alarms them.

Towards the evening a gentleman and lady, the first middle-aged, the latter very young – father and daughter – approach, their horses seeming to linger as they walk through the shallow stream, and the cool water splashes above their fetlocks. The shooting season is near at hand, Parliament has risen, and the landlords have returned home. Instead of the Row, papa must take his darling a ride through the lanes, a little dusty as the autumn comes on, and pauses to read the notice on the wall. It is his neighbour's tenant, not his, but it comes home to him here. It is the real thing – the fact – not the mere seeing it in the papers, or the warning hints in the letters of his own steward. 'Papa' is rather quiet for the rest of the ride. Ever since he was a lad – how many years ago is that? – he has shot with his neighbour's party over this farm, and recollects the tenant well, and with that friendly feeling that grows up towards what we see year after year. In a day or two the clergyman drives by with his low four-wheel and fat pony, notes the poster as

the pony slackens at the descent to the water, and tells himself to remember and get the tithe. Some few Sundays, and Farmer Smith will appear in church no more.

Farmer Smith this beautiful morning is looking at the wheat, which is, and is not, his. It would have been cut in an ordinary season, but the rains have delayed the ripening. He wonders how the crop ever came up at all through the mass of weeds that choked it, the spurrey that filled the spaces between the stalks below, the bindweed that climbed up them, the wild camomile flowering and flourishing at the edge, the tall thistles lifting their heads above it in bunches, and the great docks whose red seeds showed at a distance. He sent in some men, as much to give them something to do as for any real good, one day, who in a few hours, pulled up enough docks to fill a cart. They came across a number of snakes, and decapitated the reptiles with their hoes, and afterwards hung them all up – tied together by the tail – to a bough. The bunch of headless snakes hangs there still, swinging to and fro as the wind plays through the oak. Vermin, too, revel in weeds, which encouraged the mice and rats, and are, perhaps quite as much a cause of their increase as any acts of the gamekeeper.

Farmer Smith a few years since was very anxious for the renewal of his lease, just as those about to enter on tenancies desired leases above everything. All the agricultural world agreed that a lease was the best thing possible – the clubs discussed it, the papers preached it. It was a safeguard; it allowed the tenant to develop his energies, and to put his capital into the soil without fear. He had no dread of being turned out before he could get it back. Nothing like a lease – the certain preventative of all agricultural ills. There was, to appearance, a great deal of truth in these arguments, which in their day made much impression, and caused a movement in that direction. Who could foresee that in a few short years men would be eager to get rid of their leases on any terms? Yet such was the fact. The very men who had longed so eagerly for the blessing of security of tenure found it the worst thing possible for their interest.

Mr Smith got his lease, and paid for it tolerably stiffly, for at that period all agricultural prices were inflated – from the price of a lease to that of a calf. He covenanted to pay a certain fixed rental for so many acres of arable and a small proportion of grass

for a fixed time. He covenanted to cultivate the soil by a fixed rotation; not to sow this nor that, nor to be guided by the change of the markets, or the character of the seasons, or the appearance of powerful foreign competitors. There was the parchment prepared with all the niceties of wording that so many generations of lawyers had polished to the highest pitch; not a loophole, not so much as a 't' left uncrossed, or a doubtful interlineation. But although the parchment did not alter a jot, the times and seasons did. Wheat fell in price, vast shipments came even from India, cattle and sheep from America, wool from Australia, horses from France; tinned provisions and meats poured in by the ton, and cheese, and butter, and bacon by the thousand tons. Labour at the same time rose. His expenditure increased, his income decreased; his rent remained the same, and rent audit came round with the utmost regularity.

Mr Smith began to think about his lease, and question whether it was such an unmixed blessing. There was no getting out of it, that was certain. The seasons grew worse and worse. Smith asked for a reduction of rent. He got, like others, ten per cent returned, which, he said, looked very liberal to those who knew nothing of farming, and was in reality about as useful as a dry biscuit flung at a man who has eaten nothing for a week. Besides which, it was only a gracious condescension, and might not be repeated next year, unless he kept on his good behaviour, and paid court to the clergyman and the steward. Unable to get at what he wanted in a direct way, Smith tried an indirect one. He went at game, and insisted on its being reduced in number. This he could do according to the usual terms of agreement; but when it came to the point he found that the person called in to assess the damage put it at a much lower figure than he had himself; and who was to decide what was or was not a reasonable head of game? This attack of his on the game did him no good whatever, and was not unnaturally borne in mind – let us not say resented.

He next tried to get permission to sell straw – a permission that he saw granted to others in moderation. But he was then reminded of a speech he had made at a club, when, in a moment of temper (and sherry), he had let out a piece of his mind, which piece of his mind was duly published in the local papers, and caused a sensation. Somebody called the landlord's attention to it, and he did

not like it. Nor can he be blamed; we none of us like to be abused in public, the more especially when, looking at precedents, we do not deserve it. Smith next went to the assessment committee to get his taxes reduced, on the ground of a loss of revenue. The committee sympathized with him, but found that they must assess him according to his rent. At least so they were then advised, and only did their duty.

By this time the local bankers had scented a time of trouble approaching in the commercial and agricultural world; they began to draw in their more doubtful advances, or to refuse to renew them. As a matter of fact, Smith was a perfectly sound man, but he had so persistently complained that people began to suspect there really was something wrong with his finances. He endeavoured to explain, but was met with the tale that he had himself started. He then honestly produced his books, and laid his position bare to the last penny.

The banker believed him, and renewed part of the advance for a short period; but he began to cogitate in this wise: 'Here is a farmer of long experience, born of a farming family, and a hard-working fellow, and, more than that, honest. If this man, who has hitherto had the command of a fair amount of capital, cannot make his books balance better than this, what must be the case with some of our customers? There are many who ride about on hunters, and have a bin of decent wine. How much of all this is genuine? We must be careful; these are hard times.' In short, Smith, without meaning it, did his neighbours an immense deal of harm. His very honesty injured them. By slow degrees the bank got 'tighter' with its customers. It leaked out – all things leak out – that Smith had said too much, and he became unpopular, which did not increase his contentment.

Finally he gave notice that unless the rent was reduced he should not apply to renew the lease, which would soon expire. He had not the least intention in his secret mind of leaving the farm; he never dreamed that his notice would be accepted. He and his had dwelt there for a hundred years, and were as much part and parcel of the place as the elm trees in the hedges. So many farms were in the market going a begging for tenants, it was not probable that a landlord would let a good man go for the sake of a few shillings an acre. But the months went by and the landlord's agents gave no

sign, and at last Smith realized that he was really going to leave.

Though he had so long talked of going, it came upon him like a thunderbolt. It was like an attack of some violent fever that shakes a strong man and leaves him as weak as a child. The farmer, whose meals had been so hearty, could not relish his food. His breakfast dwindled to a pretence; his lunch fell off; his dinner grew less; his supper faded; his spirits and water, the old familiar 'nightcap', did him no good. His jolly ringing laugh was heard no more; from a thorough gossip he became taciturn, and barely opened his lips. His clothes began to hang about him, instead of fitting him all too tight; his complexion lost the red colour and became sallow; his eyes had a furtive look in them, so different to the old straightforward glance.

Some said he would take to his bed and die; some said he would jump into the pond one night, to be known no more in this world. But he neither jumped into the pond nor took to his bed. He went round his fields just the same as before – perhaps a little more mechanically; but still the old routine of daily work was gone through. Leases, though for a short period, do not expire in a day; after a while time began to produce its usual effect. The sharpness of the pain wore off, and he set to work to make the best of matters. He understood the capacity of each field as well as others understand the yielding power of a little garden. His former study had been to preserve something like a balance between what he put in and what he took out of the soil. Now it became the subject of consideration how to get the most out without putting anything in. Artificial manures were reduced to the lowest quantity and of the cheapest quality, such as was used being, in fact, nothing but to throw dust, literally, in the eyes of other people. Times were so bad that he could not be expected, under the most favourable circumstances, to consume much cake in the stalls, or make much manure in that way.

One by one extra expenditures were cut off. Gates, instead of being repaired, were propped up by running a pole across. Labour was eschewed in every possible way. Hedges were left uncut; ditches were left uncleaned. The team of horses was reduced, and the ploughing done next to nothing. Cleaning and weeding were gradually abandoned. Several fields were allowed to become overrun with grass, not the least attention being paid to them; the weeds sprang up, and the grass ran over from the hedges. The

wheat crop was kept to the smallest area. Wheat requires more previous labour and care as to soil than any other crop. Labour and preparation cost money, and he was determined not to spend a shilling more than he was absolutely compelled. He contrived to escape the sowing of wheat altogether on some part of the farm, leaving it out of the rotation. That was a direct infringement of the letter of the agreement; but who was to prove that he had evaded it? The steward could not recollect the crops on several hundred acres; the neighbouring tenants, of course, knew very well; but although Smith had become unpopular, they were not going to tell tales of him. He sold everything he dared off the farm, and many things that he did not dare. He took everything out of the soil that it was possible to take out. The last Michaelmas was approaching, and he walked round in the warm August sunshine to look at the wheat.

He sat down on an old roller that lay in the corner of the field, and thought over the position of things. He calculated that it would cost the incoming tenant an expenditure of from one thousand two hundred pounds to one thousand five hundred pounds to put the farm, which was a large one, into proper condition. It could not be got into such condition under three years of labour. The new tenant must therefore be prepared to lay out a heavy sum of money, to wait while the improvement went on, must live how he could meanwhile, and look forward some three years for the commencement of his profit. To such a state had the farm been brought in a brief time. And how would the landlord come off? The new tenant would certainly make his bargain in accordance with the state of the land. For the first year the rent paid would be nominal; for the second, perhaps a third or half the usual sum; not till the third year could the landlord hope to get his full rental. That full rental, too, would be lower than previously, because the general depression had sent down arable rents everywhere, and no one would pay on the old scale.

Smith thought very hard things of the landlord, and felt that he should have his revenge. On the other hand, the landlord thought very hard things of Smith, and not without reason. That an old tenant, the descendant of one of the oldest tenant-farmer families, should exhaust the soil in this way seemed the blackest return for the good feeling that had existed for several generations. There was great irritation on both sides.

Smith had, however to face one difficulty. He must either take another farm at once, or live on his capital. The interest of his capital – if invested temporarily in Government securities – would hardly suffice to maintain the comfortable style of living he and his rather large family of grown-up sons and daughters had been accustomed to. He sometimes heard a faint, far off ‘still small voice’, that seemed to say it would have been wiser to stay on, and wait till the reaction took place and farming recovered. The loss he would have sustained by staying on would, perhaps, not have been larger than the loss he must now sustain by living on capital till such time as he saw something to suit him. And had he been altogether wise in omitting all endeavours to gain his end by conciliatory means? Might not gentle persuasion and courteous language have ultimately produced an impression? Might not terms have been arranged had he not been so vehement? The new tenant, notwithstanding that he would have to contend with the shocking state of the farm, had such favourable terms that if he only stayed long enough to let the soil recover, Smith knew he must make a good thing of it.

But as he sat on the wooden roller under the shade of a tree and thought these things, listening to the rustle of the golden wheat as it moved in the breeze, he pulled a newspaper out of his pocket, and glanced down a long, long list of farms to let. Then he remembered that his pass-book at the bank showed a very respectable row of figures, buttoned up his coat, and strolled homeward with a smile on his features. The date fixed for the sale, as announced by the poster on the barn, came round, and a crowd gathered to see the last of the old tenant. Old Hodge viewed the scene from a distance, resting against a gate, with his chin on his hand. He was thinking of the days when he first went to plough, years ago, under Smith’s father. If Smith had been about to enter on another farm old Hodge would have girded up his loins, packed his worldly goods in a waggon, and followed his master’s fortunes thither. But Smith was going to live on his capital awhile; and old Hodge had already had notice to quit his cottage. In his latter days he must work for a new master. Down at the sale young Hodge was lounging round, hands in pocket, whistling – for there was some beer going about. The excitement of the day was a pleasurable sensation, and as for his master he might go to Kansas or Hong-Kong.

CHAPTER III

A Man of Progress

THE sweet sound of rustling leaves, as soothing as the rush of falling water, made a gentle music over a group of three persons sitting at the extremity of a lawn. Upon their right was a plantation or belt of trees, which sheltered them from the noonday sun; on the left the green sward reached to the house; from the open window came the rippling notes of a piano, and now and again the soft accents of the Italian tongue. The walls of the garden shut out the world and the wind – the blue sky stretched above from one tree-top to another, and in those tree-tops the cool breeze, grateful to the reapers in the fields, played with bough and leaf. In the centre of the group was a small table, and on it some tall glasses of antique make, and a flask of wine. By the lady lay a Japanese parasol, carelessly dropped on the grass. She was handsome, and elegantly dressed; her long, drooping eyelashes fringed eyes that were almost closed in luxurious enjoyment; her slender hand beat time to the distant song. Of the two gentlemen one was her brother – the other, a farmer, her husband. The brother wore a pith helmet, and his bronzed cheek told of service under tropical suns. The husband was scarcely less brown; still young, and very active-looking, you might guess his age at forty; but his bare forehead (he had thrown his hat on the ground) was marked with the line caused by involuntary contraction of the muscles when thinking. There was an air of anxiety, of restless feverish energy, about him. But just for the moment he was calm and happy, turning over the pages of a book. Suddenly he looked up, and began to declaim, in a clear, sweet voice:

*'He's speaking now,
Or murmuring, "Where's my serpent of old Nile?"
For so he calls me. Now I feed myself
With most delicious poison!'*

Just then there came the sharp rattle of machinery borne on the wind; he recollected himself, shut the volume, and rose from his seat. 'The men have finished luncheon,' he said; 'I must go and see how things are getting on.' The Indian officer, after one glance back at the house, went with him. There was a private footpath through the plantation of trees, and down this the two disappeared. Soon afterwards the piano ceased, and a lady came slowly across the lawn, still humming the air she had been playing. She was the farmer's sister, and was engaged to the officer. The wife looked up from the book which she had taken from the table, with a smile of welcome. But the smile faded as she said – 'They have gone out to the reapers. Oh, this farm will worry him out of his life. How I wish he had never bought it! Don't let Alick have anything to do with farms or land, dear, when you are married.'

The girl laughed, sat down, took her hand, and asked if matters were really so serious.

'It is not so much the money I trouble about,' said the wife. 'It is Cecil himself. His nature is too fine for these dull clods. You know him, dear; his mind is full of art – look at these glasses – of music and pictures. Why, he has just been reading *Antony and Cleopatra*, and now he's gone to look after reapers. Then, he is so fiery and quick, and wants everything done in a minute, like the men of business in the "city". He keeps his watch timed to a second, and expects the men to be there. They are so slow. Everything agricultural is so slow. They say we shall have fine seasons in two or three years; only think, years. That is what weighs on Cecil.'

By this time the two men had walked through the plantation, and paused at a small gate that opened on the fields. The ground fell rapidly away, sloping down for half a mile, so that every portion of the fields below was visible at once. The house and gardens were situate on the hill; the farmer had only to stand on the edge to overlook half his place.

'What a splendid view!' said the officer. The entire slope was yellow with wheat – on either hand, and in front the surface of the crop extended unbroken by hedge, tree or apparent division. Two reaping-machines were being driven rapidly round and round, cutting as they went; one was a self-binder and threw the sheaves off already bound; the other only laid the corn low, and it had afterwards to be gathered up and bound by hand-labour. There

was really a small army of labourers in the field; but it was so large they made but little show.

'You have a first-rate crop,' said the visitor: 'I see no weeds, or not more than usual; it is a capital crop.'

'Yes,' replied the farmer, 'it is a fine crop; but just think what it cost me to produce it, and bear in mind, too, the price I shall get for it.' He took out his pocket-book, and began to explain.

While thus occupied he looked anything but a farmer. His dress was indeed light and careless, but it was the carelessness of breeding, not slovenliness. His hands were brown, but there were clean white cuffs on his wrist and gold studs; his neck was brown, but his linen spotless. The face was too delicate, too refined with all its bronze; the frame was well developed, but too active; it lacked the heavy thickness and lumbering gait of the farmer bred to the plough. He might have conducted a great financial operation; he might have been the head of a great mercantile house; he might have been on 'Change; but that stiff clay there, stubborn and unimpressionable, was not in his style.

Cecil had gone into farming, in fact, as a 'commercial speculation', with the view of realizing cent per cent. He began at the time when it was daily announced that old-fashioned farming was a thing of the past. Business maxims and business practice were to be the rule of the future. Farming was not to be farming; it was to be emphatically 'business', the same as iron, coal, or cotton. Thus managed, with steam as the motive power, a fortune might be made out of the land, in the same way as out of a colliery or a mine. But it must be done in a commercial manner; there must be no restrictions upon the employment of capital, no fixed rotation of crops, no clauses forbidding the sale of any products. Cecil found, however, that the possessors of large estates would not let him a farm on these conditions. These ignorant people (as he thought them) insisted upon keeping up the traditionary customs; they would not contract themselves out of the ancient form of lease.

But Cecil was a man of capital. He really had a large sum of money, and this short-sighted policy (as he termed it) of the landlords only made him the more eager to convince them how mistaken they were to refuse anything to a man who could put capital into the soil. He resolved to be his own landlord, and ordered his agents to find him a small estate and to purchase it

outright. There was not much difficulty in finding an estate, and Cecil bought it. But he was even then annoyed and disgusted with the formalities, the investigation of title, the completion of deeds, and astounded at the length of the lawyer's bill.

Being at last established in possession Cecil set to work, and at the same time set every agricultural tongue wagging within a radius of twenty miles. He grubbed up all the hedges, and threw the whole of his arable land into one vast field, and had it levelled with the theodolite. He drained it six feet deep at an enormous cost. He built an engine-shed with a centrifugal pump, which forced water from the stream that ran through the lower ground over the entire property, and even to the topmost storey of his house. He laid a light tramway across the widest part of the estate, and sent the labourers to and fro their work in trucks. The chaff-cutters, root-pulpers, the winnowing-machine – everything was driven by steam. Teams of horses and waggons seemed to be always going to the canal wharf for coal, which he ordered from the pit wholesale.

A fine set of steam-ploughing tackle was put to work, and, having once commenced, the beat of the engines never seemed to cease. They were for ever at work tearing up the subsoil and bringing it to the surface. If he could have done it, he would have ploughed ten feet deep. Tons of artificial manure came by canal boat – positively boat loads – and were stored in the warehouse. For he put up a regular warehouse for the storage of materials; the heavy articles on the ground floor, the lighter above, hoisted up by a small crane. There was, too, an office, where the 'engineer' attended every morning to take his orders, as the bailiff might at the back-door of an old farmhouse. Substantial buildings were erected for the shorthorn cattle.

The meadows upon the estate, like the corn-fields, were all thrown together, such divisions as were necessary being made by iron railings. Machines of every class and character were provided – reaping-machines, mowing-machines, horse-hoes, horse-rakes, elevators – everything was to be done by machinery. That nothing might be incomplete, some new and well-designed cottages were erected for the skilled artisans – they could scarcely be called labourers – who were engaged to work these engines. The estate had previously consisted of several small farms; these were now

thrown all into one, otherwise there would not have been room for this great enterprise.

A complete system of booking was organized. From the sale of a bullock to the skin of a calf, everything was put down on paper. All these entries, made in books specially prepared and conveniently ruled for the purpose, came under Cecil's eye weekly, and were by him re-entered in his ledgers. This writing took up a large part of his time, and the labour was sometimes so severe that he could barely get through it: yet he would not allow himself a clerk, being economical in that one thing only. It was a saying in the place that not a speck of dust could be blown on to the estate by the wind, or a straw blown off, without it being duly entered in the master's books.

Cecil's idea was to excel in all things. Some had been famous for shorthorns before him, others for sheep, and others again for wheat. He would be celebrated for all. His shorthorns should fetch fabulous prices; his sheep should be known all over the world; his wheat should be the crop of the season. In this way he invested his capital in the soil with a thoroughness unsurpassed. As if to prove that he was right, the success of his enterprise seemed from the first assured. His crops of wheat, in which he especially put faith, and which he grew year after year upon the same land, totally ignoring the ancient rotations, were the wonder of the neighbourhood. Men came from far and near to see them. Such was the effect of draining, turning up the subsoil, continual ploughing, and the consequent atmospheric action upon the exposed earth, and of liberal manure, that here stood such crops of wheat as had never previously been seen. These he sold, as they stood, by auction; and no sooner had the purchasers cleared the ground than the engines went to work again, tearing up the earth. His meadow lands were irrigated by the centrifugal pump, and yielded three crops instead of one. His shorthorns began to get known – for he spared no expense upon them – and already one or two profitable sales had been held. His sheep prospered; there was not so much noise made about them, but, perhaps, they really paid better than anything.

Meantime, Cecil kept open house, with wine and refreshments, and even beds for everybody who chose to come and inspect his place. Nothing gave him such delight as to conduct visitors over the estate and to enter into minute details of his system. As for the

neighbouring farmers they were only too welcome. These things became noised abroad, and people arrived from strange and far off places, and were shown over this Pioneer's Farm, as Cecil loved to call it. His example was triumphantly quoted by everyone who spoke on agricultural progress. Cecil himself was the life and soul of the farmers' club in the adjacent market-town. It was not so much the speeches he made as his manner. His enthusiasm was contagious. If a scheme was started, if an experiment was suggested, Cecil's cheque-book came out directly, and the thing was set on foot without delay. His easy, elastic step, his bright eye, his warm, hearty handshake, seemed to electrify people – to put some of his own spirit into them. The circle of his influence was ever increasing – the very oldest fogeys, who had prophesied every kind of failure, were being gradually won over.

Cecil himself was transcendently happy in his work; his mind was in it; no exertion, no care or trouble, was too much. He worked harder than any navvy, and never felt fatigue. People said of him – 'What a wonderful man!' He was so genuine, so earnest, so thorough, men could not choose but believe in him. The sun shone brightly, the crops ripened, the hum of the threshing-machine droned on the wind – all was life and happiness. In the summer evenings pleasant groups met upon the lawn; the song, the jest went round; now and then an informal dance, arranged with much laughter, whiled away the merry hours till the stars appeared above the trees and the dew descended.

Yet today, as the two leaned over the little gate in the plantation and looked down upon the reapers, the deep groove which continual thought causes was all too visible on Cecil's forehead. He explained to the officer how his difficulties had come about. His first years upon the farm or estate – it was really rather an estate than a farm – had been fairly prosperous, notwithstanding the immense outlay of capital. A good percentage, in some cases a high rate of percentage, had been returned upon the money put into the soil. The seasons were good, the crops large and super-abundant. Men's minds were full of confidence, they bought freely, and were launching out in all directions.

They wanted good shorthorn cattle – he sold them cattle; they wanted sheep – he sold them sheep. They wanted wheat, and he sold them the standing crops, took the money, and so cleared his

profit and saved himself trouble. It was, in fact, a period of inflation. Like stocks and shares, everything was going up; everybody hastening to get rich. Shorthorns with a strain of blue blood fetched fancy prices; corn crops ruled high; every single thing sold well. The dry seasons suited the soil of the estate, and the machinery he had purchased was rapidly repaying its first cost in the saving of labour. His whole system was succeeding, and he saw his way to realize his cent per cent.

But by degrees the dream faded. He attributed it in the first place to the stagnation, the almost extinction, of the iron trade, the blowing out of furnaces, and the consequent cessation of the demand for the best class of food on the part of thousands of operatives and mechanics, who had hitherto been the farmers' best customers. They would have the best of everything when their wages were high; as their wages declined their purchases declined. In a brief period, far briefer than would be imagined, this shrinking of demand reacted upon agriculture. The English farmer made his profit upon superior articles – the cheaper class came from abroad so copiously that he could not compete against so vast a supply.

When the demand for high-class products fell, the English farmer felt it directly. Cecil considered that it was the dire distress in the manufacturing districts, the stagnation of trade and commerce, and the great failures in business centres, that were the chief causes of low prices and falling agricultural markets. The rise of labour was but a trifling item. He had always paid good wages to good men, and always meant to. The succession of wet seasons was more serious, of course; it lowered the actual yield, and increased the cost of procuring the yield; but as his lands were well drained, and had been kept clean, he believed he could have withstood the seasons for awhile.

The one heavy cloud that overhung agriculture, in his opinion, was the extraordinary and almost world-spread depression of trade, and his argument was very simple. When men prospered they bought freely, indulged in luxurious living, kept horses, servants, gave parties, and consumed indirectly large quantities of food. As they made fortunes they bought estates and lived half the year like country gentlemen – that competition sent up the price of land. The converse was equally true. In times of pressure households were reduced, servants dismissed, horses sold, carriages suppressed

Rich and poor acted alike indifferent degrees; but as the working population was so much more numerous it was through the low wages of the working population in cities and manufacturing districts that the farmers suffered most.

It was a period of depression – there was no confidence, no speculation. For instance, a year or two since the crop of standing wheat then growing on the very field before their eyes were sold by auction, and several lots brought from £16 to £18 per acre. This year the same wheat would not fetch £8 per acre; and, not satisfied with that price, he had determined to reap and thresh it himself. It was the same with the shorthorns, with the hay, and indeed with everything except sheep, which had been a mainstay and support to him.

‘Yet even now,’ concluded Cecil, shutting his pocket-book, ‘I feel convinced that my plan and my system will be a success. I can see that I committed one great mistake – I made all my improvements at once, laid out all my capital, and crippled myself. I should have done one thing at a time. I should, as it were, have grown my improvements – one this year, one next. As it was, I denuded myself of capital. Had the times continued favourable it would not have mattered, as my income would have been large. But the times became adverse before I was firmly settled, and, to be plain, I can but just keep things going without a loan – dear Bella will not be able to go to the sea this year; but we are both determined not to borrow.

‘In a year or two I am convinced we shall flourish again; but the waiting, Alick, the waiting, is the trial. You know I am impatient. Of course, the old-fashioned people, the farmers, all expect me to go through the Bankruptcy Court. They always said these new-fangled plans would not answer, and now they are sure they were right. Well, I forgive them their croaking, though most of them have dined at my table and drank my wine. I forgive them their croaking for so they were bred up from childhood. Were I ill-natured, I might even smile at them, for they are failing, and leaving their farms by the dozen, which seems a pretty good proof that their antiquated system is at best no better than mine. But I can see what they cannot see – signs of improvement. The steel industry is giving men work; the iron industry is reviving; the mines are slowly coming into work again; America is purchasing of us

largely; and when other nations purchase of us, part, at least, of the money always finds its way to the farmer. Next season, too, the weather may be propitious.

‘I shall hold on, Alick – a depression is certain to be followed by a rise. That has been the history of trade and agriculture for generations. Nothing will ever convince me that it was intended for English agriculturists to go on using wooden ploughs, to wear smock-frocks, and plod round and round in the same old track for ever. In no other way but by science, by steam, by machinery, by artificial manure, and, in one word, by the exercise of intelligence, can we compete with the world. It is ridiculous to suppose we can do so by returning to the ignorance and prejudice of our ancestors. No; we must beat the world by superior intelligence and superior energy. But intelligence, mind, has ever had every obstacle to contend against. Look at M. Lesseps and his wonderful Suez Canal. I tell you that to introduce scientific farming into England, in the face of tradition, custom, and prejudice, is a far harder task than overcoming the desert sand.’

CHAPTER IV

Going Downhill

AN aged man, coming out of an arable field into the lane, pauses to look back. He is shabbily clad, and there is more than one rent in his coat; yet it is a coat that has once been a good one, and of a superior cut to what a labourer would purchase. In the field the ploughman to whom he has been speaking has started his team again. A lad walks beside the horses, the iron creaks, and the ploughman holding the handles seems now to press upon them with his weight, and now to be himself bodily pulled along. A dull November cloud overspreads the sky, and misty skits of small rain sweep across the landscape. As the old man looks back from the gate, the chill breeze whistles through the boughs of the oak above him, tearing off the brown dry leaves, and shaking out the acorns to fall at his feet. It lifts his grey hair, and penetrates the threadbare coat. As he turns to go, something catches his eye on the ground, and from the mud in the gateway he picks up a cast horse-shoe. With the rusty iron in his hand he passes slowly down the lane, and, as he goes, the bitter wind drives the fallen leaves that have been lying beside the way rustling and dancing after him.

From a farmer occupying a good-sized farm he had descended to be a farmer's bailiff in the same locality. But a few months since he was himself a tenant, and now he is a bailiff at 15s. a week and a cottage. There is nothing dramatic, nothing sensational, in the history of his descent; but it is, perhaps, all the more full of bitter human experiences. As a man going down a steep hill, after a long while finds himself on the edge of a precipitous chalk pit, and topples in one fall to the bottom, so, though the process of going downhill occupied so long, the actual finish came almost suddenly. Thus it was that from being a master he found himself a servant. He does not complain, nor appeal for pity. His back is a little more bowed, he feels the cold a little more, his step is yet more spiritless.

But all he says about it is that 'Hard work never made any money yet.'

He had worked exceedingly hard all his lifetime. In his youth, though the family were then well-to-do, he was not permitted to lounge about in idleness, but had to work with the rest in the fields. He dragged his heavy nailed shoes over the furrows with the plough; he reaped and loaded in harvest time; in winter he trimmed the hedgerows, split logs, and looked after the cattle. He enjoyed no luxurious education – luxurious in the sense of scientifically arranged dormitories, ample meals, and vacations to be spent on horseback, or with the breechloader. Trudging to and fro the neighbouring country town, in wind and wet, and snow, to school, his letters were thrashed into him. In holiday time he went to work – his holidays, in fact, were so arranged as to fall at the time when the lad could be of most use in the field. If an occasion arose when a lad was wanted, his lessons had to wait while he lent a hand. He had his play, of course, as boys in all ages have had; but it was play of a rude character with the plough lads, and the almost equally rough sons of farmers, who worked like ploughmen.

In those days the strong made no pretence to protect the weak, or to abnegate their natural power. The biggest lad used his thews and sinews to knock over the lesser without mercy, till the lesser by degrees grew strong enough to retaliate. To be thrashed, beaten, and kicked was so universal an experience that no one ever imagined it was not correct, or thought of complaining. They accepted it as a matter of course. As he grew older his work simply grew harder, and in no respect differed from that of the labourers, except that he directed what should be done next, but none the less assisted to do it.

Thus the days went on, the weeks, and months, and years. He was close upon forty years old before he had his own will for a single day. Up to almost that age he worked on his father's farm as a labourer among the labourers, as much under parental authority as when he was a boy of ten. When the old man died it was not surprising that the son, so long held down in bondage – bondage from which he had not the spirit to escape – gave way for a short period to riotous living. There was hard drinking, horse-racing, and card-playing, and waste of substance generally.

But it was not for long, for several reasons. In the first place, the

lad of forty years, suddenly broken forth as it were from school, had gone past the age when youth plunges beyond recall. He was a grown man, neither wise nor clever; but with a man's sedateness of spirit and a man's hopes. There was no innate evil in his nature to lead him into unrighteous courses. Perhaps his fault rather lay in his inoffensive disposition – he submitted too easily. Then, in the second place, there was not much money, and what there was had to meet many calls.

The son found that the father, though reputed a substantial man, and a man among farmers of high esteem and good family, had been anything but rich. First there were secret debts that had run on for fully thirty years – sums of from fifty to one hundred pounds – borrowed in the days of his youth, when he, too, had at last been released in a similar manner from similar bondage, to meet the riotous living in which he also had indulged. In those earlier days there had been more substance in cattle and coin and he had had no difficulty in borrowing ready money from adjoining farmers, who afterwards helped him to drink it away. These boon companions had now grown old. They had never pressed their ancient comrade for the principal, the interest being paid regularly. But now their ancient comrade was dead they wanted their money, especially when they saw the son indulging himself, and did not know how far he might go. Their money was paid, and reduced the balance in hand materially.

Now came a still more serious matter. The old man, years ago, when corn farming paid so handsomely, had been induced by the prospect of profit to take a second and yet larger farm, nearly all arable. To do this he was obliged, in farming phrase, to 'take up' – i.e. to borrow – a thousand pounds, which was advanced to him by the bank. Being a man of substance, well reputed, and at that date with many friends, the thousand pounds was forthcoming readily, and on favourable terms. The enterprise, however, did not prosper; times changed, and wheat was not so profitable. In the end he had the wisdom to accept his losses and relinquish the second farm before it ate him up. Had he only carried his wisdom a little farther and repaid the whole of the bank's advance, all might yet have been well. But he only repaid five hundred pounds, leaving five hundred pounds still owing. The bank having regularly received the interest, and believing the old gentleman upright – as

he was – was not at all anxious to have the money back, as it was earning fair interest. So the five hundred remained on loan, and, as it seemed, for no very definite purpose.

Whether the old gentleman liked to feel that he had so much money at command (a weakness of human nature common enough), or whether he thought he could increase the produce of his farm by putting it in the soil, it is not possible to say. He certainly put the five hundred out of sight somewhere, for when his son succeeded him it was nowhere to be found. After repaying the small loans to his father's old friends, upon looking round the son saw cattle, corn, hay, and furniture, but no five hundred pounds in ready money. The ready money had been muddled away – simply muddled away, for the old man had worked hard, and was not at all extravagant.

The bank asked for the five hundred, but not in a pressing manner, for the belief still existed that there was money in the family. That belief was still further fostered because the old friends whose loans had been repaid talked about that repayment, and so gave a colour to the idea. The heir, in his slow way, thought the matter over and decided to continue the loan. He could only repay it by instalments – a mode which, to a farmer brought up in the old style, is almost impossible, for though he might meet one he would be sure to put off the next – or by selling stock (equivalent to giving up his place), or by borrowing afresh. So he asked and obtained a continuation of the loan of the five hundred, and was accommodated, on condition that some one 'backed' him. Someone in the family did back him, and the fatal mistake was committed of perpetuating this burden. A loan never remains at the same sum; it increases if it is not reduced. In itself the five hundred was not all a heavy amount for the farm to carry, but it was the nucleus around which additional burdens piled themselves up. By a species of gravitation such a burden attracts others, till the last straw breaks the camel's back. This, however, was not all.

The heir discovered another secret which likewise contributed to sober him. It appeared that the farm, or rather the stock, and so on, was really not all his father's. His father's brother had a share in it – a share of which even the most inquisitive gossips of the place were ignorant. The brother being the eldest (himself in business as a farmer at some distance) had the most money, and

had advanced a certain sum to the younger to enable him to start his farm, more than a generation since. From that day to this not one shilling of the principal had been repaid, and the interest only partially and at long intervals. If the interest were all claimed it would now amount to nearly as much as the principal. The brother – or, rather, the uncle – did not make himself at all unpleasant in the matter. He only asked for about half the interest due to him, and at the same time gave the heir a severe caution not to continue the aforesaid riotous living. The heir, now quite brought down to earth after his momentary exaltation, saw the absolute necessity of acquiescence. With a little management he paid the interest – leaving himself with barely enough to work the farm. The uncle, on his part, did not act unkindly; it was he who ‘backed’ the heir up at the bank in the matter of the continuation of the loan of the five hundred pounds. This five hundred pounds the heir had never seen and never would see; so far as he was concerned it did not exist; it was a mere figure, but a figure for which he must pay. In all these circumstances there was nothing at all exceptional.

At this hour throughout the width and breadth of the country there are doubtless many farmers’ heirs stepping into their fathers’ shoes, and at this very moment looking into their affairs. It may be safely said that few indeed are those fortunate individuals who find themselves clear of similar embarrassments. In this particular case detailed above, if the heir’s circumstances had been rigidly reduced to figures – if a professional accountant had examined them – it would have been found that, although in possession of a large farm, he had not got one scrap of capital.

But he was in possession of the farm, and upon that simple fact of possession he henceforth lived, like so many, many more of his class. He returned to the routine of labour, which was a part of his life. After a while he married, as a man of forty might naturally wish to, and without any imputation of imprudence so far as his own age was concerned. The wife he chose was one from his own class, a good woman, but, as is said to be often the case, she reflected the weakness of her husband’s character. He now worked harder than ever – a labourer with the labourers. He thus saved himself the weekly expense of the wages of a labourer – perhaps, as labourers do not greatly exert themselves, of a man and a boy. But while thus slaving with his hands and saving this small sum

in wages, he could not walk round and have an eye upon the other men. They could therefore waste a large amount of time, and thus he lost twice what he had saved. Still, his intention was commendable, and his persistent, unvarying labour really wonderful. Had he but been sharper with his men he might still have got a fair day's work out of them while working himself. From the habit of associating with them from boyhood he had fallen somewhat into their own loose, indefinite manner, and had lost the prestige which attaches to a master. To them he seemed like one of themselves, and they were as much inclined to argue with him as to obey. When he met them in the morning he would say, 'Perhaps we had better do so and so,' or 'Suppose we go and do this or that.' They often thought otherwise; and it usually ended in a compromise, the master having his way in part, and the men in part. This lack of decision ran through all, and undid all that his hard work achieved. Everything was muddled from morn till night, from year's end to year's end. As children came the living indoors became harder, and the work out of doors still more laborious.

If a farmer can put away fifty pounds a year, after paying his rent and expenses, if he can lay by a clear fifty pounds of profit, he thinks himself a prosperous man. If this farmer, after forty years of saving, should chance to be succeeded by a son as thrifty, when he too has carried on the same process for another twenty years, then the family may be, for village society, wealthy, with three or even four thousand pounds, besides goods and gear. This is supposing all things favourable, and men of some ability, making the most of their opportunities. Now reverse the process. When children came, as said before, our hard-working farmer found the living indoors harder, and the labour without heavier. Instead of saving fifty pounds a year, at first the two sides of the account (not that he ever kept any books) about balanced. Then, by degrees, the balance dropped the wrong way. There was a loss of twenty or thirty pounds on the year, and presently of forty or fifty pounds, which could only be made good by borrowing, and so increasing the payment of interest.

Although it takes sixty years – two generations – to accumulate a village fortune by saving fifty pounds a year, it does not occupy so long to reduce a farmer to poverty when half that sum is annually lost. There was no strongly marked and radical defect

in his system of farming to account for it; it was the muddling, and the muddling only, that did it. His work was blind. He would never miss giving the pigs their dinner. He rose at half past three in the morning, and foddered the cattle in the grey dawn, or milked a certain number of cows, with unvarying regularity. But he had no foresight, and no observation whatever. If you saw him crossing a field, and went after him, you might walk close behind, placing your foot in the mark just left by his hoe, and he would never know it. With his hands behind his back, and his eyes upon the ground, he would plod across the field, perfectly unconscious that anyone was following him. He carried on the old rotation of cropping in the piece of arable land belonging to the farm, but in total oblivion of any advantage to be obtained by local change of treatment. He could plan nothing out for next year. He spent nothing, or next to nothing, on improved implements; but, on the other hand, he saved nothing, from a lack of resource and contrivance.

As the years went by he fell out of the social life of the times; that is, out of the social life of his own circle. He regularly fed the pigs; but when he heard that the neighbours were all going in to the town to attend some important agricultural meeting, or to start some useful movement, he put his hands behind his back and said that he should not go; he did not understand anything of that sort. So he went to luncheon on bread and cheese and small ale. Such a course could only bring him into the contempt of his fellow-men. He became a nonentity. No one had any respect for or confidence in him. Otherwise, possibly, he might have obtained powerful help, for the memory of what his family had been had not yet died out.

Men saw that he lived and worked as a labourer; they gave him no credit for the work, but they despised him for the meanness and churlishness of his life. There was neither a piano nor a decanter of sherry in his house. He was utterly out of accord with the times. By degrees, after many years, it became apparent to all that he was going downhill. The stock upon the farm was not so large nor of so good a character as had been the case. The manner of men visibly changed towards him. The small dealers, even the very carriers along the road, the higglers, and other persons who call at a farm on petty business, gave him clearly to know in their

own coarse way that they despised him. They flatly contradicted him, and bore him down with loud tongues. He stood it all meekly, without showing any spirit; but, on the other hand, without resentment, for he never said ill of any man behind his back.

It was put about now that he drank, because some busybody had seen a jar of spirits carried into the house from the wine merchant's cart. A jar of spirits had been delivered at the house at intervals for years and years, far back into his father's time, and every one of those who now expressed their disgust at his supposed drinking habits had sipped their tumblers in that house without stint. He did not drink – he did not take one half at home what his neighbours imbibed without injury at markets and auctions every week of their lives. But he was growing poor, and they called to mind that brief spell of extravagance years ago, and pointed out to their acquaintances how the sin of the Prodigal was coming home to him.

No man drinks the bitter cup of poverty to the dregs like the declining farmer. The descent is so slow; there is time to drain every drop, and to linger over the flavour. It may be eight, or ten, or fifteen years about. He cannot, like the bankrupt tradesman, even when the fatal notice comes, put up his shutters at once and retire from view. Even at the end, after the notice, six months at least elapse before all is over – before the farm is surrendered, and the sale of household furniture and effects take place. He is full in public view all that time. So far as his neighbours are concerned he is in public view for years previously. He has to rise in the morning and meet them in the fields. He sees them in the road; he passes through groups of them in the market-place. As he goes by they look after him, and perhaps audibly wonder how long he will last. These people all knew him from a lad, and can trace every inch of his descent. The labourers in the field know it, and by their manner show that they know it.

His wife – his wife who worked so hard for so many, many years – is made to know it too. She is conspicuously omitted from the social gatherings that occur from time to time. The neighbours' wives do not call; their well-dressed daughters, as they rattle by to the town in basket-carriage or dog-cart, look askance at the shabby figure walking slowly on the path beside the road. They criticize the shabby shawl; they sneer at the slow step which

is the inevitable result of hard work, the cares of maternity, and of age. So they flaunt past with an odour of perfume, and leave the 'old lady' to plod unrecognized.

The end came at last. All this blind work of his was of no avail against the ocean steamer and her cargo of wheat and meat from the teeming regions of the West. Nor was it of avail against the fall of prices, and the decreased yield consequent upon a succession of bad seasons. The general lack of confidence pressed heavily upon a man who did not even attempt to take his natural place among his fellow-men. The loan from the bank had gradually grown from five to seven or eight hundred by thirties, and forties, and fifties added to it by degrees; and the bank – informed, perhaps, by the same busybodies who had discovered that he drank – declined further assistance, and notified that part, at least, of the principal must be repaid. The landlord had long been well aware of the state of affairs, but refrained from action out of a feeling for the old family. But the land, from the farmer's utter lack of capital, was now going from bad to worse. The bank having declined to advance further, the rent began to fall into arrear. The landlord caused it to be conveyed to his tenant that if he would quit the farm, which was a large one, he could go into a smaller, and his affairs might perhaps be arranged.

The old man – for he was now growing old – put his hands behind his back and said nothing, but went on with his usual routine of work. Whether he had become dulled and deadened and cared nothing, whether hope was extinct, or he could not wrench himself from the old place, he said nothing. Even then some further time elapsed – so slow is the farmer's fall that he might almost be excused for thinking that it would never come. But now came the news that the old uncle who had 'backed' him at the bank had been found dead in bed of sheer old age. Then the long-kept secret came out at last. The dead man's executors claimed the money advanced so many, many years ago.

This discovery finished it. The neighbours soon had food for gossip in the fact that a load of hay which he had sold was met in the road by the landlord's agent and turned back. By the strict letter of his agreement he could not sell hay off the farm; but it had been permitted for years. When they heard this they knew it was all over. The landlord, of course, put in his claim; the bank theirs.

In a few months the household furniture and effects were sold, and the farmer and his aged wife stepped into the highway in their shabby clothes.

He did not, however, starve; he passed to a cottage on the outskirts of the village, and became bailiff for the tenant of that very arable farm to work which years ago his father had borrowed the thousand pounds that ultimately proved their ruin. He made a better bailiff than a farmer, being at home with every detail of practice, but incapable of general treatment. His wife does a little washing and charring; not much, for she is old and feeble. No charity is offered to them – they have outlived old friends – nor do they appeal for any. The people of the village do not heed them, nor reflect upon the spectacle in their midst. They are merged and lost in the vast multitude of the agricultural poor. Only two of their children survive; but these, having early left the farm and gone into a city, are fairly well-to-do. That, at least, is a comfort to the old folk.

It is, however, doubtful, whether the old man, as he walks down the lane with his hands behind his back and the dead leaves driven by the November breeze rustling after, has much feeling of any kind left. Hard work and adversity have probably deadened his finer senses. Else one would think he could never endure to work as a servant upon that farm of all others, not to daily pass the scenes of his youth. For yonder, well in sight as he turns a corner of the land, stands the house where he dwelt so many, many years; where the events of his life came slowly to pass; where he was born; where his bride came home; where his children were born; and from whose door he went forth penniless.

Seeing this every day, surely that old man, if he have but one spark of feeling left, must drink the lees of poverty to the last final doubly bitter dregs.

CHAPTER V

The Borrower and the Gambler

‘WHERE do he get the money from, you?’

‘It be curious, bean’t it; I minds when his father drove folks’ pigs to market.’ These remarks passed between two old farmers, one standing on the sward by the roadside, and the other talking to him over the low hedge, as a gentleman drove by in a White-chapel dogcart, groom behind. The gentleman glanced at the two farmers, and just acknowledged their existence with a careless nod, looking at the moment over their heads and far away.

There is no class so jealous of a rapid rise as old-fashioned farming people. They seem to think that if a man once drove pigs to market he should always continue to do so, and all his descendants likewise. Their ideas in a measure approximate to those of caste among the Hindoos. It is a crime to move out of the original groove; if a man be lowly he must remain lowly, or never be forgiven. The lapse of time makes not the least difference. If it takes the man thirty years to get into a fair position he is none the less guilty. A period equal to the existence of a generation is not sufficient excuse for him. He is not one whit better than if he had made his money by a lucky bet on a racehorse. Nor can he ever hope to live down this terrible social misdemeanour, especially if it is accompanied by the least ostentation.

Now, in the present day a man who gets money shows off more than ever was the case. In the olden time the means of luxury were limited, and the fortunate could do little more than drink, and tempt others to drink. But today the fortunate farmer in the dogcart, dressed like a gentleman, drove his thoroughbred, and carried his groom behind. Frank D—, Esq., in the slang of the time, ‘did the thing grand!’ The dog-cart was a first-rate article. The horse was a high-stepper, such as are not to be bought for a song; the turn-out was at the first glance perfect. But if you looked

keenly at the groom, there was a suspicion of the plough in his face and attitude. He did not sit like a man to the manner born. He was lumpy; he lacked the light, active style characteristic of the thoroughbred groom, who is as distinct a breed as the thoroughbred horse. The man looked as if he had been taken from the plough and was conscious of it. His feet were in top-boots, but he could not forget the heavy action induced by a long course of walking in wet furrows. The critics by the hedge were not capable of detecting these niceties. The broad facts were enough for them. There was the gentleman in his ulster, there was the resplendent turn-out, there was the groom, and there was the thoroughbred horse. The man's father drove their pigs to market, and they wanted to know where he got the money from.

Meantime, Mr D—, having carelessly nodded, had gone on. Half a mile farther some of his own fields were contiguous to the road, yet he did not, after the fashion of the farmer generally, pause to gaze at them searchingly; he went on with the same careless glance. This fact, which the old-fashioned folk had often observed, troubled them greatly. It seemed so unnatural, so opposite to the old ideas and ways, that a man should take no apparent interest in his own farm. They said that Frank was nothing of a farmer; he knew nothing of farming. They looked at his ricks; they were badly built, and still worse thatched. They examined his meadows, and saw wisps of hay lying about, evidence of neglect; the fields had not been properly raked. His ploughed fields were full of weeds, and not half-worked enough. His labourers had acquired a happy-go-lucky style, and did their work anyhow or not at all, having no one to look after them. So, clearly, it was not Frank's good farming that had made him so rich, and enabled him to take so high and leading a position.

Nor was it his education or his 'company' manners. The old folk noted his boorishness and lack of the little refinements which mark the gentleman. His very voice was rude and hoarse, and seemed either to grumble or to roar forth his meaning. They had frequently heard him speak in public — he was generally on the platform when any local movement was in progress — and could not understand why he was put up there to address the audience, unless it was for his infinite brass. The language he employed was rude, his sentences disjointed, his meaning incoherent; but he had

a knack of an *apropos* jest, not always altogether savoury, but which made a mixed assembly laugh. As his public speeches did not seem very brilliant, they supposed he must have the gift of persuasion in private. He did not even ride well to hounds – an accomplishment that has proved a passport to a great landlord's favour before now – for he had an awkward, and to the eye not too secure a seat in the saddle.

Nor was it his personal appearance. He was very tall and ungainly, with a long neck and a small round head on the top of it. His features were flat, and the skin much wrinkled; there seemed nothing in his countenance to recommend him to the notice of the other sex. Yet he had been twice married; the last time to a comparatively young lady with some money, who dressed in the height of fashion.

Frank had two families – one, grown up, by his first wife, the second in the nursery – but it made no difference to him. All were well dressed and well educated; the nursery maids and the infants went out for their airings in a carriage and pair. Mrs D—, gay as a Parisian belle, and not without pretensions to beauty, was seen at balls, parties, and every other social amusement. She seemed to have the *entrée* everywhere in the county. All this greatly upset and troubled the old folk, whose heads Frank looked over as he carelessly nodded them good morning driving by. The cottage people from whose ranks his family had so lately risen, however, had a very decided opinion upon the subject, and expressed it forcibly. ‘’Pend upon it,’ they said, ‘’pend upon it, he have zucked zumbody in zumhow.’

This unkind conclusion was perhaps not quite true. The fact was, that Frank, aided by circumstances, had discovered the ease with which a man can borrow. That was his secret – his philosopher's stone. To a certain extent, and in certain ways, he really was a clever man, and he had the luck to begin many years ago when farming was on the ascending side of the cycle. The single solid basis of his success was his thorough knowledge of cattle – his proficiency in dealership. Perhaps this was learnt while assisting his father to drive other folks' pigs to market. At all events, there was no man in the county who so completely understood cattle and sheep, for buying and selling purposes, as Frank. At first he gained his reputation by advising others what and when to

buy; by degrees, as people began to see that he was always right, they felt confidence in him, and assisted him to make small investments on his own account. There were then few auctioneers, and cattle were sold in open market. If a man really was a judge, it was as good to him as a reputation for good ale is to an innkeeper. Men flock to a barrel of good ale, no matter whether the inn be low class or high class. Men gather about a good judge of cattle, and will back him up. By degrees D— managed to rent a small farm, more for the purpose of having a place to turn his cattle into than for farming proper — he was, in fact, a small dealer.

Soon afterwards there was an election. During the election, Frank gained the good will of a local solicitor and political agent. He proved himself an active and perhaps a discreetly unscrupulous assistant. The solicitor thought he saw in Frank talent of a certain order — a talent through which he (the solicitor) might draw unto himself a share of other people's money. The lawyer's judgment of men was as keen as Frank's judgment of cattle. He helped Frank to get into a larger farm, advancing the money with which to work it. He ran no risk; for, of course, he had Frank tight in the grasp of his legal fist, and he was the agent for the landlord. The secret was this — the lawyer paid his clients four per cent for the safe investment of their money. Frank had the money, worked a large farm with it, and speculated in the cattle markets, and realized some fifteen or perhaps twenty per cent, of which the lawyer took the larger share. Something of this sort has been done in other businesses besides farming. Frank, however, was not the man to remain in a state of tutelage, working for another. His forte was not saving — simple accumulation was not for him; but he looked round the district to discover those who had saved.

Now, it is a fact that no man is so foolish with his money as the working farmer in a small way, who has put by a little coin. He is extremely careful about a fourpenny piece, and will wrap a sovereign up in several scraps of paper lest he should lose it; but with his hundred or two hundred pounds he is quite helpless. It has very likely occupied him the best part of his lifetime to add one five pound note to another, money most literally earned in the sweat of his brow; and at last he lends it to a man like Frank, who has the wit to drive a carriage and ride a thoroughbred. With the strange inconsistency so characteristic of human nature, a half-

educated, working farmer of this sort will sneer in his rude way at the pretensions of such a man, and at the same time bow down before him.

Frank knew this instinctively, and, as soon as ever he began to get on, set up a blood-horse and a turn-out. By dint of such vulgar show and his own plausible tongue he persuaded more than one such old fellow to advance him money. Mayhap these confiding persons, like a certain Shallow, J.P., have since earnestly besought him in vain to return them five hundred of their thousand. In like manner one or two elderly maiden ladies – cunning as magpies in their own conceit – let him have a few spare hundreds. They thought they could lay out this money to better advantage than the safe family adviser ‘uncle John’, with his talk of the Indian railways and a guaranteed five per cent. They thought (for a while) that they had done a very clever thing on the sly in lending their spare hundreds to the great Mr Frank D— at a high rate of interest, and by this time would perhaps be glad to get the money back again in the tea-caddy.

But Frank was not the man to be satisfied with such small game. After a time he succeeded in getting at the ‘squire’. The squire had nothing but the rents of his farms to live upon, and was naturally anxious for an improving tenant who would lay out money and put capital into the soil. He was not so foolish as to think that Frank was a safe man, and of course he had legal advice upon the matter. The squire thought, in fact, that although Frank himself had no money, Frank could get it out of others, and spend it upon his place. It did not concern the squire where or how Frank got his money, provided he had it – he as landlord was secure in case of a crash, because the law gave him precedence over all other creditors. So Frank ultimately stepped into one of the squire’s largest farms and cut a finer dash than ever.

There are distinct social degrees in agriculture. The man who occupies a great farm under a squire is a person of much more importance than he who holds a little tenancy of a small proprietor. Frank began to take the lead among the farmers of the neighbourhood, to make his appearance at public meetings, and to become a recognized politician – of course upon the side most powerful in that locality, and most likely to serve his own interest. His assurance, and, it must be owned, his ready wit, helped him in coming

to the front. When at the front, he was invited to the houses of really well-to-do country people. They condoned his bluff manners – they were the mark of the true, solid British agriculturist. Some perhaps in their hearts thought that another day they might want a tenant, and this man would serve their turn. As a matter of fact, Frank took every unoccupied farm which he could get at a tolerably reasonable rent. He never seemed satisfied with the acreage he held, but was ever desirous of extending it. He took farm after farm, till at last he held an area equal to a fine estate. For some years there has been a disposition on the part of landlords to throw farms together, making many small ones into one large one. For the time, at all events, Frank seemed to do very well with all these farms to look after. Of course, the same old-fashioned folk made ill-natured remarks, and insisted upon it that he merely got what he could out of the soil, and did not care in the least how the farming was done. Nevertheless, he flourished – the high prices and general inflation of the period playing into his hand.

Frank was now a very big man, the biggest man thereabout. And it was now that he began to tap another source of supply – to, as it were, open a fresh cask – i.e. the local bank. At first, he only asked for a hundred or so, a mere bagatelle, for a few days – only a temporary convenience. The bank was glad to get hold of what really looked like legitimate business, and he obtained the bagatelle in the easiest manner – so easily that it surprised him. He did not himself yet quite know how completely his showy style of life, his large acreage, his speeches, and politics, and familiarity with great people, had imposed upon the world in which he lived. He now began to realize that he was somebody. He repaid the loan to the day, waited awhile and took a larger one, and from that time the frequency and the amount of his loans went on increasing.

We have seen in these latter days bank directors bitterly complaining that they could not lend money at more than seven-eighths or even one half per cent, so little demand was there for accommodation. They positively could not lend their money; they had millions in their tills unemployed, and practically going a-begging. But here was Frank paying seven per cent for short loans, and upon a continually enlarging amount. His system, so far as the seasons were concerned, was something like this. He took a loan (or renewed an old one) at the bank on the security of the first

draught of lambs for sale, say, in June. This paid the labourers, and the working expenses of the hay harvest, and of preparing for the corn. He took the next upon the second draught of lambs in August, which paid the reapers. He took a third on the security of the crops, partly cut, or in process of cutting, for his Michaelmas rent. Then for the fall of the year he kept on threshing out and selling as he required money, and had enough left to pay for the winter's work. This was Frank's system – the system of too many farmers, far more than would be believed. Details of course vary, and not all, like Frank, need three loans at least in the season to keep them going. It is not every man who mortgages his lambs, his ewes (the draught from a flock for sale), and the standing crops in succession.

But of late years farming has been carried on in such an atmosphere of loans, and credit, and percentage, and so forth, that no one knows what is or what is not mortgaged. You see a flock of sheep on a farm, but you do not know to whom they belong. You see the cattle in the meadow, but you do not know who has a lien upon them. You see the farmer upon his thoroughbred, but you do not know to whom in reality the horse belongs. It is all loans and debt. The vendors of artificial manure are said not to be averse sometimes to make an advance on reasonable terms to those enterprising and deserving farmers who grow so many tons of roots, and win the silver cups, and so on, for the hugest mangold grown with their particular manure. The proprietors of the milk-walks in London are said to advance money to the struggling dairymen who send them their milk. And latterly the worst of usurers have found out the farmers – i.e. the men who advance on bills of sale of furniture, and sell up the wretched client who does not pay to the hour. Upon such bills of sale English farmers have been borrowing money, and with the usual disastrous results. In fact, till the disastrous results became so conspicuous, no one guessed that the farmer had descended so far. Yet, it is a fact, and a sad one.

All the while the tradespeople of the market towns – the very people who have made the loudest outcry about the depression and the losses they have sustained – these very people have been pressing their goods upon the farmers, whom they must have known were many of them hardly able to pay their rents. Those

who have not seen it cannot imagine what a struggle and competition has been going on in little places where one would think the very work was unknown, just to persuade the farmer and the farmer's family to accept credit. But there is another side to it. The same tradesman who today begs – positively begs – the farmer to take his goods on any terms, in six months' time sends his bill, and, if it be not paid immediately, puts the County Court machinery in motion.

Now this to the old-fashioned farmer is a very bitter thing. He has never had the least experience of the County Court; his family never were sued for debt since they can remember. They have always been used to a year's credit at least – often two, and even three. To be threatened with public exposure in the County Court because a little matter of five pounds ten is not settled instantly is bitter indeed. And to be sued so arbitrarily by the very tradesman who almost stuffed his goods down their throats is more bitter still.

Frank D—, Esq.'s coarse grandeur answered very well indeed so long as prices were high. While the harvests were large and the market inflated; while cattle fetched good money; while men's hearts were full of mirth – all went well. It is whispered now that the grand Frank has secretly borrowed £25 of a little cottage shop-keeper in the adjacent village – a man who sells farthing candles and ounces of tea – to pay his reapers. It is also currently whispered that Frank is the only man really safe, for the following reason – they are all 'in' so deep they find it necessary to keep him going. The squire is 'in', the bank is 'in', the lawyer is 'in', the small farmers with two hundred pounds capital are 'in', and the elderly ladies who took their banknotes out of their tea-caddies are 'in'. That is to say, Mr Frank owes them so much money that, rather than he should come to grief (when they must lose pretty well all), they prefer to keep him afloat. It is a noticeable fact, that Frank is the only man who has not raised his voice and shouted 'Depression'. Perhaps the squire thinks that so repellent a note, if struck by a leading man like Frank, might not be to his interest, and has conveyed the thought to the gentleman in the dog-cart with the groom behind. There are, however, various species of the façade farmer.

'What kind of agriculture is practised here?' the visitor from town naturally asks his host, as they stroll towards the turnips (in

another district), with shouldered guns. 'Oh, you had better see Mr X—' is the reply. 'He is our leading agriculturist; he'll tell you all about it.' Everybody repeats the same story, and once Mr X—'s name is started everybody talks of him. The squire, the clergyman — even in casually calling at a shop in the market town, or at the hotel (there are few inns now) — wherever he goes the visitor hears from all of Mr X—. A successful man — most successful, progressive, scientific, intellectual. 'Like to see him? Nothing easier. Introduction? Nonsense. Why he'd be delighted to see you. Come with me.'

Protesting feebly against intruding on privacy, the visitor is hurried away, and expecting to meet a solid, sturdy, and somewhat gruff old gentleman of the John Bull type, endeavours to hunt up some ideas about shorthorns and bacon pigs. He is a little astonished upon entering the pleasure grounds to see one or more gardeners busy among the parterres and shrubberies, the rhododendrons, the cedar deodaras, the laurels, the pampas grass, the 'carpet gardening' beds, and the glass of distant hot-houses glittering in the sun. A carriage and pair, being slowly driven by a man in livery from the door down to the extensive stabling, passes — clearly some of the family have just returned. On ringing, the callers are shown through a spacious hall with a bronze or two on the marble table, into a drawing-room, elegantly furnished. There is a short iron grand open with a score carelessly left by the last player, a harp in the corner, half hidden by the curtains, some pieces of Nankin china on the side tables.

Where are the cow-sheds? Looking out of window a level lawn extends, and on it two young gentlemen are playing tennis, in appropriate costume. The laboured platitudes that had been prepared about shorthorns and bacon pigs are quite forgotten, and the visitor is just about to risk the question if his guide has not missed the farm-house and called at the squire's, when Mr X— comes briskly in, and laughs all apology about intrusion to the winds in his genial manner. He insists on his friends taking some refreshment, will not take refusal; and such is the power of his vivacity, that they find themselves sipping Madeira and are pressed to come and dine in the evening, before one at least knows exactly where he is. 'Just a homely spread, you know; pot-luck; a bit of fish and a glass of Moet; now *do* come.' This curious mixture of bluff

cordiality, with 'unexpected snatches of refinement, is Mr X—'s great charm. 'Style of farming; tell you with pleasure.' (Rings the bell.) 'John' (to the man servant), 'take this key and bring me account book No. 6B, Copse Farm; that will be the best way to begin.'

If the visitor knows anything of country life, he cannot help recollecting that, if the old type of farmer was close and mysterious about anything, it was his accounts. Not a word could be got out of him of profit or loss, or revenue; he would barely tell you his rent per acre, and it was doubtful if his very wife ever saw his pass-book. Opening account book No. 6B, the explanation proceeds.

'My system of agriculture is simplicity itself, sir. It is all founded on one beautiful commercial precept. Our friends round about here (with a wave of the hand, indicating the countryside) – our old folks – whenever they got a guinea put it out of sight, made a hoard, hid it in a stocking, or behind a brick in the chimney. Ha! Ha! Consequently their operations were always restricted to the same identical locality – no scope, sir, no expansion. Now my plan is – invest every penny. Make every shilling pay for the use of half a crown, and turn the half-crown into seven and sixpence. Credit is the soul of business. There you have it. Simplicity itself. Here are the books; see for yourself. I publish my balance half-yearly – like a company. Then the public see what you are doing. The earth, sir, as I said at dinner the other day (the idea was much applauded), the earth is like the Bank of England – you may draw on it to any extent; there's always a reserve to meet you. You positively can't overdraw the account. You see there's such a solid security behind you. The fact is, I bring commercial principles into agriculture; the result is, grand success. However, here's the book; just glance over the figures.'

The said figures utterly bewilder the visitor, who in courtesy runs his eye from top to bottom of the long columns – farming accounts are really the most complicated that can be imagined – so he, meantime, while turning over the pages, mentally absorbs the personality of the commercial agriculturist. He sees a tall, thin farmer, a brown face and neck, long restless sinewy hands, perpetually twiddling with a cigar or a gold pencil-case – generally the cigar, or rather the extinct stump of it, which he every now and then sucks abstractedly, in total oblivion as to its condition. His

dress would pass muster in towns – well cut, and probably from Bond Street. He affects a frock and high hat one day, and knickerbockers and sun helmet the next. His pockets are full of papers, letters, etc., as he searches amid the mass for some memorandum to show, glimpses may be seen of certain oblong strips of blue paper with an impressed stamp.

‘Very satisfactory,’ says the visitor, hand-back No. 6B; ‘may I inquire how many acres you occupy?’

Out comes a notebook, ‘Hum! There’s a thousand down in the vale, and fifteen hundred upland, and the new place is about nine hundred, and the meadows – I’ve mislaid the meadows – but it’s near about four thousand. Different holdings, of course, Great nuisance that, sir; transit, you see, costs money. City gentlemen know that. Absurd system in this country – the land parcelled out in little allotment gardens of two or three hundred acres. Why, there’s a little paltry hundred and twenty acre freehold dairy farm lies between my vale and upland, and the fellow won’t let my waggons or ploughing-tackle take the short cut. Ridiculous. Time it was altered, sir. Shooting? Why, yes; I have the shooting. Glad if you’d come over.’

Then more Madeira, and after it a stroll through the gardens to the sheds, a mile, or nearly, distant. There, a somewhat confused vision of ‘grand shorthorns’, and an inexplicable jumble of pedigrees, grand-dams, and ‘g-g-g-g-g-g-dams’, as the catalogues have it; handsome hunters paraded, steam-engines pumping water, steam-engines slicing up roots, distant columns of smoke where steam-engines are tearing up the soil. All the while a scientific disquisition on ammonia and the constituent parts and probably value of town sewage as compared with guano. And, at intervals, and at parting, a pressing invitation to dinner (when pineapples or hot-house grapes are certain to make their appearance at dessert) – such a flow of genial eloquence surely was never heard before!

It requires a week at least of calm reflection, and many questions to his host, before the visitor – quite carried away – can begin to arrange his ideas, and to come slowly to the opinion that though Mr X— is as open as the day and frank to a fault, it will take him a precious long time to get to the bottom of Mr X—’s system; that is to say, if there is any bottom at all to it.

Mr X— is, in brief, a gambler. Not in a dishonest, or even suspicious sense, but a pure gambler. He is a gigantic agricultural speculator; his system is, as he candidly told you, credit. Credit not only with the bank, but with everybody. He has actually been making use of you, his casual and unexpected visitor, as an instrument. You are certain to talk about him; the more he is talked of the better, it gives him a reputation, which is beginning to mean a great deal in agriculture as it has so long in other pursuits. You are sure to tell everybody who ever chooses to converse with you about the country of Mr X—, and Mr X—'s engines, cattle, horses, profuse hospitality, and progressive science.

To be socially popular is a part of his system; he sows corn among society as freely as over his land, and looks to some grains to take root, and bring him increase a hundredfold, as indeed they do. Whatever movement is originated in the neighbourhood finds him occupying a prominent position. He goes to London as the representative of the local agricultural chamber; perhaps waits upon a Cabinet Minister as one of the deputation. He speaks regularly at the local chamber meetings; his name is ever in the papers. The press are invited to inspect his farms, and are furnished with minute details. Every now and then a sketch of his life and doings, perhaps illustrated with a portrait, appears in some agricultural periodical. At certain seasons of the year parties of gentlemen are conducted over his place. In parochial or district matters he is a leading man.

Is it a cottage flower-show, a penny reading, a cricket club, a benefit society — it does not matter what, his subscription, his name, and his voice are heard in it. He is the life and soul of it; the energy comes from him, though others higher in the scale may be the nominal heads. And the nominal heads, knowing that he can be relied upon politically, are grateful, and give him their good word freely. He hunts, and is a welcome companion — the meet frequently takes place at his house, or some of the huntsmen call for lunch; in fact, the latter is an invariable thing. Everybody calls for lunch who happens to pass near any day; the house has a reputation for hospitality. He is the clergyman's right hand — as in managing the school committee. When the bishop comes to the confirmation, he is introduced as 'my chief lay supporter'. At the Rural Diaconal Conference, 'my chief supporter' is one of the lay

speakers. Thus he obtains every man's good word whose good word is worth anything. Social credit means commercial credit. Yet he is not altogether acting a part – he really likes taking the lead and pushing forward, and means a good deal of what he says.

He is especially quite honest in his hospitality. All the same, so far as business is concerned, it is pure gambling, which may answer very well in favourable times, but is not unlikely to end in failure should the strain of depression become too severe. Personal popularity, however, will tide him over a great deal. When a man is spoken highly of by gentry, clergy, literally everybody, the bank is remarkably accommodating. Such a man may get for his bare signature – almost pressed on him, as if his acceptance of it were a favour – what another would have to deposit solid security for.

In plain language, he borrows money and invests it in every possible way. His farms are simply the basis of his credit. He buys blood shorthorns, he buys blood horses, and he sells them again. He buys wheat, hay, etc., to dispose of them at a profit. If he chose, he could explain to you the meaning of *contango*, and even of that mysterious term to the uninitiated, '*backwardation*'. His speculations for the '*account*' are sometimes heavy. So much so, that occasionally, with thousands invested, he has hardly any ready money. But, then, there are the crops; he can get money on the coming crops. There is, too, the livestock – money can be borrowed on the stock.

Here lies the secret reason of the dread of foreign cattle disease. The increase of our flocks and herds is, of course, a patriotic cry (and founded on fact); but the secret pinch is this – if foot and mouth, pleuro-pneumonia, or rinderpest threaten the stock, the tenant-farmer cannot borrow on that security. The local bankers shake their heads – three cases of rinderpest are equivalent to a reduction of twenty-five per cent in the borrowing power of the agriculturist. The auctioneers and our friend have large transactions – '*paper*' here again. With certain members of the hunt he books bets to a high amount; his face is not unknown at Tattersall's, or at the race-meetings. But he does not flourish the betting-book in the face of society. He bets – and holds his tongue. Some folks have an ancient and foolish prejudice against betting; he respects sincere convictions.

Far and away he is the best fellow, the most pleasant company

in the shire, always welcome everywhere. He has read widely, is well educated; but, above all, he is ever jolly, and his jollity is contagious. Despite his investments and speculations, his brow never wears that sombre aspect of gloomy care, that knitted concentration of wrinkles seen on the face of the City man, who goes daily to his 'office'. The out-of-door bluffness, the cheery ringing voice, and the upright form only to be gained in the saddle over the breezy uplands, cling to him still. He wakes everybody up, and, risky as perhaps some of his speculations are, is socially enlivening.

The two young gentlemen, by-the-bye, observed playing lawn-tennis from the drawing-room window, are two of his pupils, whose high premiums and payments assist to keep up the free and generous table, and who find farming a very pleasant profession. The most striking characteristic of their tutor is his Yankee-like fertility of resource and bold innovations – the very antipodes of the old style of 'clod-compeller'.

CHAPTER VI

An Agricultural Genius — Old Style

TOWARDS the hour of noon Harry Hodson, of Upcourt Farm, was slowly ascending the long slope that led to his dwelling. In his left hand he carried a hare, which swung slightly to and fro as he stepped out, and the black-tipped ears rubbed now and then against a bunch of grass. His double-barrel was under his right arm. Every day at the same hour Harry turned towards home, for he adhered to the ways of his fathers and dined at half past twelve, except when the stress of harvest, or some important agricultural operation, disturbed the usual household arrangements. It was a beautiful October day, sunny and almost still, and, as he got on the high ground, he paused and looked round. The stubbles stretched far away on one side, where the country rose and fell in undulations. On the distant horizon a column of smoke, broadening at the top, lifted itself into the sky; he knew it was from the funnel of a steam-plough, whose furnace had just been replenished with coal. The appearance of the smoke somewhat resembled that left by a steamer at sea when the vessel is just below the horizon. On the other hand were wooded meadows, where the rooks were cawing — some in the oaks, some as they wheeled round in the air. Just beneath him stood a row of wheat ricks — his own. His gaze finally rested upon their conical roofs with satisfaction, and he then resumed his walk.

Even as he moved he seemed to bask in the sunshine; the sunshine pouring down from the sky above, the material sunshine of the goodly wheat ricks, and the physical sunshine of personal health and vigour. His walk was the walk of a strong, prosperous man — each step long, steady, and firm, but quite devoid of haste. He was, perhaps, forty years of age, in the very prime of life, and though stooping a little, like so many countrymen, very tall, and built proportionately broad across the shoulders and chest. His

features were handsome – perhaps there was a trace of indolence in their good-humoured expression – and he had a thick black beard just marked with one thin wavy line of grey. That trace of snow, if anything, rather added to the manliness of his aspect, and conveyed the impression that he was at the fulness of life when youth and experience meet. If anything, indeed, he looked too comfortable, too placid. A little ambition, a little restlessness, would perhaps have been good for him.

By degrees he got nearer to the house; but it was by degrees only, for he stayed to look over every gate, and up into almost every tree. He stopped to listen as his ear caught the sound of hoofs on the distant road, and again at the faint noise of a gun fired a mile away. At the corner of a field a team of horses – his own – were resting awhile as the carter and his lad ate their luncheon. Harry stayed to talk to the man, and yet again at the barn door to speak to his men at work within with the winnowing machine. The homestead stood on an eminence, but was hidden by elms and sycamores, so that it was impossible to pass at a distance without observing it.

On entering the sitting-room Harry leaned his gun against the wall in the angle between it and the bureau, from which action alone it might have been known that he was a bachelor, and that there were no children about the house to get into danger with fire-arms. His elderly aunt, who acted as housekeeper, was already at table waiting for him. It was spread with a snow-white cloth, and almost equally snow-white platter for bread – so much and so well was it cleaned. They ate home-baked bread; they were so many miles from a town or baker that it was difficult to get served regularly, a circumstance which preserved that wholesome institution. There was a chine of bacon, small ale, and a plentiful supply of good potatoes. The farmer did full justice to the sweet picking off the chine, and then lingered over an old cheese. Very few words were spoken.

Then, after his dinner, he sat in his armchair – the same that he had used for many years – and took a book. For Harry rather enjoyed a book, provided it was not too new. He read works of science, thirty years old, solid and correct, but somewhat behind the age; he read histories, such as were current in the early part of the present century, but none of a later date than the end of the wars of the First Napoleon. The only thing modern he cared for

in literature was a 'society' journal, sent weekly from London. These publications are widely read in the better class of farmsteads now. Harry knew something of most things, even of geology. He could show you the huge vertebrae of some extinct saurian, found while draining was being done. He knew enough of archaeology to be able to tell any enthusiastic student who chanced to come along where to find the tumuli and the earthworks on the Downs. He had several Roman coins, and a fine bronze spearhead, which had been found upon the farm. These were kept with care, and produced to visitors with pride. Harry really did possess a wide fund of solid, if quiet, knowledge. Presently, after reading a chapter or two, he would drop of into a siesta, till some message came from the men or the bailiff, asking for instructions.

The farmstead was, in fact, a mansion of large size, an old manor-house, and had it been situate near a fashionable suburb and been placed in repair would have been worth to let as much per annum as the rent of a small farm. But it stood in a singularly lonely and outlying position, far from any village of size, much less a town, and the very highway even was so distant that you could only hear the horse's hoofs when the current of air came from that direction. This was his aunt's – the housekeeper's – great complaint, the distance to the highway. She grumbled because she could not see the carriers' carts and the teams go by; she wanted to know what was going on.

Harry, however, seemed contented with the placid calm of the vast house that was practically empty, and rarely left it, except for his regular weekly visit to market. There were three brothers, all in farms and all well to do; the other two were married, and Harry was finely plagued about being a bachelor. But the placid life at the old place – he had succeeded to his father – somehow seemed to content him. He had visitors at Christmas, he read his books of winter evenings and after dinner; in autumn he strolled round with his double-barrel and knocked over a hare or so, and so slumbered away the days. But he never neglected the farming – everything was done almost exactly as it had been done by his father.

Old Harry Hodson was in his time one of the characters of that country side. He was the true founder of the Hodson family. They had been yeomen in a small way for generations, farming little

holdings, and working like labourers, plodding on, and never heard of outside their fifty-acre farms. So they might have continued till this day had not old Harry Hodson arose to be the genius — the very Napoleon — of farming in that district. When the present Harry, the younger, had a visitor to his taste — i.e. one who was not in a hurry — he would, in the evening, pull out the books and papers and letters of his late father from the bureau (beside which stood the gun), and explain how the money was made. The logs crackled and sparkled on the hearth, the lamp burnt clear and bright; there was a low singing sound in the chimney; the elderly aunt nodded and worked in her armchair, and woke up and mixed fresh spirits and water, and went off to sleep again; and still Harry would sit and smoke and sip and talk. By and by, the aunt would wish the visitor good night, draw up the clock, and depart, after mixing fresh tumblers and casting more logs upon the fire, for well she knew her nephew's ways. Harry was no tippler, he never got intoxicated; but he would sit and smoke and sip and talk with a friend, and tell him all about it till the white daylight came peeping through the chinks in the shutters.

Old Harry Hodson, then, made the money, and put two of his sons in large farms, and paid all their expenses, so that they started fair, beside leaving his own farm to the third. Old Harry Hodson made the money, yet he could not have done it had he not married the exact woman. Women have made the fortunes of Emperors by their advice and assistance, and the greatest men the world has seen have owned that their success was owing to feminine counsel. In like manner a woman made the policy of an obscure farmer a success. When the old gentleman began to get well-to-do, and when he found his teeth not so strong as of yore, and his palate less able to face the coarse, fat, yellowy bacon that then formed the staple of the household fare, he actually ventured so far as to have one joint of butcher's meat, generally a leg of mutton, once a week. It was cooked for Sunday, and, so far as that kind of meat was concerned, lasted till the next Sunday. But his wife met this extravagant innovation with furious opposition. It was sheer waste; it was something almost unpardonably prodigal. They had eaten bacon all their lives, often bacon with the bristles thick upon it, and to throw away money like this was positively wicked. However, the old gentleman and his wife — this dispute as to which should be most

parsimonious – was typical of their whole course of life. If one saved cheese-parings, the other would go without cheese at all, and be content with dry bread. They lived, indeed, harder than their own labourers, and it sometimes happened that the food they thought good enough was refused by a cottager. When a strange carter, or shepherd, or other labourer came to the house from a distance, perhaps with a waggon for a load of produce or with some sheep, it was the custom to give them some lunch. These men, unaccustomed even in their own cottages to such coarse food, often declined to eat it, and went away empty, but not before delivering their opinion of the fare, expressed in language of the rudest kind.

No economy was too small for old Hodson; in the house his wife did almost all the work. Now-a-days a farmer's house alone keeps the women of one, or even two, cottages fully employed. The washing is sent out, and occupies one cottage woman the best part of her spare time. Other women come in to do the extra work, the cleaning up and scouring, and so on. The expense of employing these women is not great; but still it is an expense. Old Mrs Hodson did everything herself, and the children roughed it how they could, playing in the mire with the pigs and geese. Afterwards, when old Hodson began to get a little money, they were sent to a school in a market town. There they certainly did pick up the rudiments, but lived almost as hard as at home. Old Hodson, to give an instance of his method, would not even fatten a pig, because it cost a trifle of ready money for 'toppings', or meal, and nothing on earth could induce him to part with a coin that he had once grasped. He never fattened a pig (meaning for sale), but sold the young porkers directly they were large enough to fetch a sovereign a-piece, and kept the money.

The same system was carried on throughout the farm. The one he then occupied was of small extent, and he did a very large proportion of the work himself. He did not purchase stock at all in the modern sense; he grew them. If he went to a sale he bought one or two despicable-looking cattle at the lowest price, drove them home, and let them gradually gather condition. The grass they ate grew almost as they ate it – in his own words, 'They cut their own victuals' – i.e. with their teeth. He did not miss the grass blades, but had he paid a high price then he would have missed the money.

Here he was in direct conflict with modern farming. The theory of the farming of the present day is that time is money, and, according to this, Hodson made a great mistake. He should have given a high price for his stock, have paid for cake, etc., and fattened them up as fast as possible, and then realized. The logic is correct, and in any business or manufacture could not be gainsaid. But Hodson did just the reverse. He did not mind his cattle taking a little time to get into condition, provided they cost him no ready money. Theoretically, the grass they ate represented money, and might have been converted to a better use. But in practice the reverse came true. He succeeded, and other men failed. His cattle and his sheep, which he bought cheap and out of condition, quietly improved (time being no object), and he sold them at a profit, for which there were no long bills to deduct for cake.

He purchased no machinery whilst in this small place - which was chiefly grass land - with the exception of a second-hand hay-making machine. The money he made he put out at interest on mortgage of real property, and it brought in about four per cent. It was said that in some few cases where the security was good he lent it at a much higher rate to other farmers of twenty times the outward show. After a while he went into the great farm now occupied by his son Harry, and commenced operations without borrowing a single shilling. The reason was because he was in no hurry. He slowly grew his money in the little farm, and then, and not till then, essayed the greater. Even then he would not have ventured had not the circumstances been peculiarly favourable. Like the present, it was a time of depression generally, and in this particular case the former tenant had lived high and farmed bad. The land was in the worst possible state, the landlord could not let it, and Hodson was given to understand that he could have it for next to nothing at first.

Now it was at this crisis of his life that he showed that in his own sphere he possessed the true attribute of genius. Most men who had practised rigid economy for twenty years, whose hours, and days, and weeks had been occupied with little petty details, how to save a penny here and a fourpenny bit yonder, would have become fossilized in the process. Their minds would have become as narrow as their ways. They would have shrunk from any venture, and continued in the old course to the end of their time.

Old Hodson, mean to the last degree in his way of living, narrow to the narrowest point where sixpence could be got, nevertheless had a mind. He saw that his opportunity had come, and he struck. He took the great corn farm, and left his little place. The whole countryside at once pronounced him mad, and naturally anticipated his failure. The countryside did not yet understand two things. They did not know how much money he had saved, and they did not know the capacity of his mind. He had not only saved money, and judiciously invested it, but he had kept it a profound secret, because he feared if his landlord learnt that he was saving money so fast the rent of the little farm would have been speedily raised. Here, again, he was in direct conflict with the modern farmer. The modern man, if he has a good harvest or makes a profit, at once buys a 'turn-out', and grand furniture, and in every way 'exalts his gate'. When landlords saw their tenants living in a style but little inferior to that they themselves kept up, it was not really very surprising that the rents a few years back began to rise so rapidly. In a measure tenants had themselves to blame for that upward movement.

Old Hodson carried his money to a long distance from home to invest, so anxious was he that neither his landlord nor anyone else should know how quickly he was getting rich. So he entered upon his new venture – the great upland farm, with its broad cornfields, its expanse of sheep walk and down, its meadows in the hollow, its copses (the copses alone almost as big as his original holding), with plenty of money in his pocket, and without being beholden to bank or lawyer for a single groat. Men thought that the size of the place, the big manor-house, and so on, would turn his head. Nothing of the kind; he proceeded as cautiously and prudently as previously. He began by degrees. Instead of investing some thousand pounds in implements and machinery at a single swoop, instead of purchasing three hundred sheep right off with a single cheque, he commenced with one thing at a time. In this course he was favoured by the condition of the land, and by the conditions of the agreement. He got it, as it were, gradually into cultivation, not all at once; he got his stock together, a score or two at a time, as he felt they would answer. By the year the landlord was to have the full rent the new tenant was quite able to pay it, and did pay it without hesitation at the very hour it was due. He bought very

little machinery, nothing but what was absolutely necessary — no expensive steam-plough. His one great idea was still the same, i.e. spend no money.

Yet he was not bigoted or prejudiced to the customs of his ancestors — another proof that he was a man of mind. Hodson foresaw, before he had been long at Upcourt Farm, that corn was not going in future to be so all in all important as it had been. As he said himself, 'We must go to our flocks now for our rent,' and not to our barn doors.' His aim, therefore, became to farm into and through his flock, and it paid him well. Here was a man at once economical to the verge of meanness, prudent to the edge of timidity, yet capable of venturing when he saw his chance; and above all, when that venture succeeded, capable of still living on bacon and bread and cheese, and putting the money by.

In his earlier days Hodson was as close of speech as of expenditure, and kept his proceedings a profound secret. As he grew older and took less active exercise — the son resident at home carrying out his instructions — he became more garrulous and liked to talk about his system. The chief topic of his discourse was that a farmer in his day paid but one rent, to the landlord, whereas now, on the modern plan, he paid eight rents, and sometimes nine. First, of course, the modern farmer paid his landlord (1); next he paid the seedsman (2); then the manure manufacturer (3); the implement manufacturer (4); the auctioneer (5); the railroad, for transit (6); the banker, for short loans (7); the lawyer or whoever advanced half his original capital (8); the schoolmaster (9).

To begin at the end, the rent paid by the modern farmer to the schoolmaster included the payment for the parish school; and, secondly, and far more important, the sum paid for the education of his own children. Hodson maintained that many farmers paid as much hard cash for the education of their children, and for the necessary social surroundings incident to that education, as men used to pay for the entire sustenance of their households. Then there was the borrowed capital, and the short loans from the banker; the interest on these two made two more rents. Farmers paid rent to the railroad for the transit of their goods. The auctioneer, whether he sold cattle and sheep, or whether he had a depot for horses, was a new man whose profits were derived from the farmers. There were few or no auctioneers or horse depositories

when he began business; now the auctioneer was everywhere, and every country town of any consequence had its establishment for the reception and sale of horses. Farmers sunk enough capital in steam-ploughs and machinery to stock a small farm on the old system, and the interest on this sunk capital represented another rent. It was the same with the artificial manure merchant and with the seedsman. Farmers used to grow their own seed, or, at most, bought from the corner dealers or a neighbour if by chance they were out. Now the seedsman was an important person, and a grand shop might be found, often several shops, in every market town, the owners of which shops must likewise live upon the farmer. Here were eight or nine people to pay rent to instead of one.

No wonder farming nowadays was not profitable. No wonder farmers could not put their sons into farms. Let anyone look round their own neighbourhood and count up how many farmers had managed to do that. Why, they were hardly to be found. Farmers' sons had to go into the towns to get a livelihood now. Farming was too expensive a business on the modern system – it was a luxury for a rich man, who could afford to pay eight or nine landlords at once. The way he had got on was by paying one landlord only. Old Hodson always finished his lecture by thrusting both hands into his breeches pockets, and whispering to you confidentially that it was not the least use for a man to go into farming now unless he had got ten thousand pounds.

It was through the genius of this man that his three sons were doing so well. At the present day, Harry, the younger, took his ease in his armchair after his substantial but plain dinner, with little care about the markets or the general depression. For much of the land was on high ground and dry, and the soil there benefited by the wet. At the same time sheep sold well, and Harry's flocks were large and noted. So he sauntered round with his gun, and knocked over a hare, and came comfortably home to dinner, easy in his mind, body, and pocket.

Harry was not a man of energy and intense concentrated purpose like his father. He could never have built up a fortune, but, the money being there, Harry was just the man to keep it. He was sufficiently prudent to run no risk and to avoid speculation. He was sufficiently frugal not to waste his substance on riotous living, and he was naturally of a placid temperament, so that he

was satisfied to silently and gradually accumulate little by little. His knowledge of farming, imbibed from his father, extended into every detail. If he seldom touched an implement now, he had in his youth worked like the labourers, and literally followed the plough. He was constantly about on the place, and his eye, by keeping the men employed, earned far more money than his single arm could have done. Thus he dwelt in the lonely manor-house, a living proof of the wisdom of his father's system.

Harry is now looking, in his slow complacent way, for a wife. Being forty years of age, he is not in a great hurry, and is not at all inclined to make a present of himself to the first pretty face he meets. He does not like the girl of the period; he fears she would spend too much money. Nor, on the other hand, does he care for the country hoyden, whose mind and person have never risen above the cheese-tub, with red hands, awkward gait, loud voice, and limited conversation. He has read too much, in his quiet way, and observed too much, in his quiet way also, for that. He wants a girl well educated, but not above her station, unaffected and yet comely, fond of house and home duties, and yet not homely. And it would be well if she had a few hundreds – a very small sum would do – for her dower. It is not that he wants the money, which can be settled on herself; but there is a vein of the old, prudent common sense running through Harry's character. He is in no hurry; in time he will meet with her somewhere.

CHAPTER VII

The Gig and the Four-in-Hand A Bicycle Farmer

Two vehicles were gradually approaching each other from opposite directions on a long straight stretch of country road, which, at the first glance, appeared level. The glare of the August sunshine reflected from the white dust, the intense heat that caused a flickering motion of the air like that which may be seen over a flue, the monotonous low cropped hedges, the scarcity of trees, and boundless plain of cornfields, all tended to deceive the eye. The road was not really level, but rose and fell in narrow, steep valleys, that cross it at right angles – the glance saw across these valleys without recognizing their existence. It was curious to observe how first one and then the other vehicle suddenly disappeared, as if they had sunk into the ground, and remained hidden for some time. During the disappearance the vehicle was occupied in cautiously going down one steep slope and slowly ascending the other. It then seemed to rapidly come nearer till another hollow intervened, and it was abruptly checked. The people who were driving could observe each other from a long distance, and might naturally think that they should pass directly, instead of which they did not seem to get much nearer. Some miles away, where the same road crossed the Downs, it looked from afar like a white line drawn perpendicularly up the hill.

The road itself was narrow, hardly wider than a lane, but on either side was a broad strip of turf, each strip quite twice the width of the metalled portion. On the verge of the dust the red pimpernel opened its flowers to the bright blue cloudless sky, and the lowly convulvulus grew thickly among the tall dusty bennets. Sweet short clover flowers stood but a little way back; still nearer the hedges the grass was coarser, long, and wire-like. Tall thistles

stood beside the water furrows and beside the ditch, and round the hawthorn bushes that grew at intervals on the sward isolated from the hedge. Loose flints of great size lay here and there among the grass, perhaps rolled aside surreptitiously by the stone-breakers to save themselves trouble. Everything hot and dusty. The clover dusty, the convolvulus dusty, the brambles and hawthorn, the small scattered elms all dusty, all longing for a shower or for a cool breeze.

The reapers were at work in the wheat, but the plain was so level that it was not possible to see them without mounting upon a flint heap. Then their heads were just visible as they stood upright, but when they stooped to use the hook they disappeared. Yonder, however, a solitary man in his shirt-sleeves perched up above the corn went round and round the field, and beside him strange awkward arms seemed to beat down the wheat. He was driving a reaping machine, to which the windmill-like arms belonged. Beside the road a shepherd lingered, leaning on a gate, while his flock, which he was driving just as fast and no faster than they cared to eat their way along the sward, fed part on one side and part on the other. Now and then two or three sheep crossed over with the tinkling of a bell. In the silence and stillness and brooding heat, the larks came and dusted themselves in the white impalpable powder of the road. Farther away the partridges stole quietly to an anthill at the edge of some barley. By the white road, a white millstone, chipped and defaced, stood almost hidden among thistles and brambles. Some white railings guarded the sides of a bridge, or rather a low arch over a dry watercourse. Heat, dust, a glaring whiteness, and a boundless expanse of golden wheat on either hand.

After a while a towering four-in-hand coach rose out of the hollow where it had been hidden, and came bowling along the level. The rapid hoofs beat the dust, which sprang up and followed behind in a cloud, stretching far in the rear, for in so still an atmosphere the particles were long before they settled again. White parasols and light dust coats – everything that could be contrived for coolness – gay feathers and fluttering fringes, whose wearers sat in easy attitudes enjoying the breeze created by the swift motion. Upon such a day the roof of a coach is more pleasant than the thickest shade, because of that current of air, for the same

leaves that keep off the sun also prevent a passing zephyr from refreshing the forehead. But the swifter the horses the sweeter the fresh wind to fan the delicate cheek and the drooping eyelid of indolent beauty. So idle were they all that they barely spoke, and could only smile instead of laugh if one exerted himself to utter a good jest. The gentleman who handled the ribbons was the only one thoroughly awake.

His eyes were downcast, indeed, because they never left his horses, but his ears were sharply alive to the rhythmic beat of the hoofs and the faint creak and occasional jingle of the harness. Had a single shoe failed to send forth the proper sound as it struck the hard dry road, had there been a creak or a jingle too many, or too few, those ears would instantly have detected it. The downcast eyes that looked neither to the right nor left – at the golden wheat or the broad fields of barley – were keenly watching the ears of the team and noting how one of the leaders lathered and flung white froth upon the dust. From that height the bowed backs of the reapers were visible in the corn. The reapers caught sight of the coach, and stood up to look, and wiped their brows, and a distant hurrah came from the boys among them. In all the pomp and glory of paint and varnish the tall coach rolled on, gently swaying from side to side as the springs yielded to the irregularities of the road. It came with a heavy rumble like far-away thunder over the low arch that spanned the dry watercourse.

Meantime the vehicle approaching from the opposite direction had also appeared out of a hollow. It was a narrow gig of ancient make, drawn by a horse too low for the shafts and too fat for work. In the gig sat two people closely pressed together by reason of its narrow dimension. The lady wore a black silk dress, of good and indeed costly material, but white with the dust that had settled upon it. Her hands were covered with black cotton gloves, and she held a black umbrella. Her face was hidden by a black veil; thin corkscrew curls fringed the back of her head. She was stout, and sat heavily in the gig. The man wore a grey suit, too short in the trousers – at least they appeared so as he sat with his knees wide apart, and the toe of one heavy boot partly projecting at the side of the dash-board. A much-worn straw hat was drawn over his eyes, and he held a short whip in his red hand. He did not press his horse, but allowed the lazy animal to go jog-trot at his own pace.

The panels of the gig had lost their original shining polish; the varnish had cracked and worn, till the surface was rough and grey. The harness was equally bare and worn, the reins mended more than once. The whole ramshackle concern looked as if it would presently fall to pieces, but the horse was in much too good a condition.

When the four-in-hand had come within about a hundred yards, the farmer pulled his left rein hard, and drew his gig right out of the road on to the sward, and then stopped dead, to give the coach the full use of the way. As it passed he took off his straw hat, and his wife stooped low, as a makeshift for bowing. An outsider might have thought that the aristocratic coach would have gone by this extremely humble couple without so much as noticing it. But the gentleman who was driving lifted his hat to the dowdy lady, with a gesture of marked politeness, and a young and elegantly-dressed lady, his sister, nodded and smiled, and waved her hand to her. After the coach had rolled some fifty yards away, the farmer pulled into the road, and went on through the cloud of dust it had left behind it, with a complacent smile upon his hard and weather-worn features. 'A' be a nice young gentleman, the Honourable be,' said he presently. 'So be Lady Blanche,' replied his wife, lifting her veil and looking back after the four-in-hand. 'I'm sure her smile's that sweet it be a pleasure for to see her.'

Half a mile farther the farmer drew out of the road again, drove close to the hedge, stopped, and stood up to look over. A strongly-built young man, who had been driving the reaping machine in his shirt-sleeves, alighted from his seat and came across to the hedge.

'Goes very well today,' he said, meaning that the machine answered.

'You be got into a good upstanding piece, John,' replied the old man sharply in his thin jerky voice, which curiously contrasted with his still powerful frame. 'You take un in there and try un' – pointing to a piece where the crop had been beaten down by a storm, and where the reapers were at work. 'You had better put the rattletrap thing away, John, and go in and help they. Never wasted money in all my life over such a thing as that before. What be he going to do all the winter? Bide and rust, I 'spose. Can you put un to cut off they nettles along the ditch among they stones?'

'It would break the knives,' said the son.

'But you could cut um with a hook, couldn't you?' asked the old man, in a tone that was meant to convey withering contempt of a machine that could only do one thing, and must perforce lie idle ten months of the year.

'That's hardly a fair way of looking at it,' the son ventured.

'John,' said his mother, severely, 'I can't think how you young men can contradict your father. I'm sure young men never spoke so in my time, and I'm sure your father has been prospered in his farming (she felt her silk dress), and has done very well without any machines, which cost a deal of money, and Heaven knows there's a vast amount going out every day.'

A gruff voice interrupted her – one of the reapers had advanced along the hedge, with a large earthenware jar in his hand.

'Measter,' he shouted to the farmer in the gig, 'cam't you send us out some better tackle than this yer stuff?'

He poured some ale out of the jar on the stubble with an expression of utter disgust.

'It be the same as I drink myself,' said the farmer, sharply, and immediately sat down, struck the horse, and drove off.

His son and the labourer – who could hardly have been distinguished apart so far as their dress went – stood gazing after him for a few minutes. They then turned, and each went back to his work without a word.

The farmer drove on steadily homewards at the same jog-trot pace that had been his wont these forty years. The house stood a considerable distance back from the road: it was a gabled building of large size, and not without interest. It was approached by a drive that crossed a green, where some ducks were waddling about, and entered the front garden, which was surrounded by a low wall. Within was a lawn and an ancient yew tree. The porch was overgrown with ivy, and the trees that rose behind the grey tiles of the roof set the old house in a frame of foliage. A fine old English homestead, where any man might be proud to dwell. But the farmer did not turn up the drive. He followed the road till he came to a gate leading into the rickyard, and, there getting out of the gig, held the gate open while the horse walked through. He never used the drive or the front door, but always came in and went out at the back, through the rickyard.

The front garden and lawn were kept in good order, but no one

belonging to the house ever frequented it. Had any stranger driven up to the front door, he might have hammered away with the narrow knocker – there was no bell – for half an hour before making anyone hear, and then probably it would have been by the accident of the servant going by the passage, and not by dint of noise. The household lived in the back part of the house. There was a parlour well furnished, sweet with flowers placed there fresh daily, and with the colour of those in the garden, whose scent came in at the ever open window; but no one sat in it from week's end to week's end. The whole life of the inmates passed in two back rooms – a sitting-room and kitchen.

With some slight concessions to the times only, Farmer M— led the life his father led before him, and farmed his tenancy upon the same principles. He did not, indeed, dine with the labourers, but he ate very much the same food as they did. Some said he would eat what no labourer or servant would touch; and, as he had stated, drank the same smallest of small beer. His wife made a large quantity of home-made wine every year, of which she partook in a moderate degree, and which was the liquor usually set before visitors. They rose early, and at once went about their work. He saw his men, and then got on his horse and rode round the farm. He returned to luncheon, saw the men again, and again went out and took a turn of work with them. He rode a horse because of the distance – the farm being large – not for pleasure. Without it he could not have visited his fields often enough to satisfy himself that the labourers were going on with their work. He did not hunt, nor shoot – he had the right, but never exercised it; though occasionally he was seen about the newly-sown fields with a single-barrel gun, firing at the birds that congregated in crowds. Neither would he allow his sons to shoot or hunt.

One worked with the labourers, acting as working bailiff – it was he who drove the reaping machine, which after long argument and much persuasion the farmer bought, only to grumble at and abuse every day afterwards. The other was apprenticed as a lad to a builder and carpenter of the market town, and learned the trade exactly as the rest of the men did there. He lodged in the town in the cheapest of houses, ate hard bread and cheese with the carpenters and masons and bricklayers, and was glad when the pittance he received was raised a shilling a week. Once now and

then he walked over to the farm on Sundays or holidays – he was not allowed to come too often. They did not even send him in a basket of apples from the great orchard; all the apples were carefully gathered and sold.

These two sons were now grown men, strong and robust, and better educated than would have been imagined – thanks to their own industry and good sense, and not to any schooling they received. Two finer specimens of physical manhood it would have been difficult to find, yet their wages were no more than those of ordinary labourers and workmen. The bailiff, the eldest, had a pound a week, out of which he had to purchase every necessary, and from which five shillings were deducted for lodgings. It may be that he helped himself to various little perquisites, but his income from every source was not equal to that of a junior clerk. The other nominally received more, being now a skilled workman; but as he had to pay for his lodgings and food in town, he was really hardly so well off. Neither of these young men had the least chance of marrying till their father should die; nothing on earth would induce him to part with the money required to set the one up in business or the other in a separate farm. He had worked all his time under his father, and it seemed to him perfectly natural that his sons should work all their time under him.

There was one daughter, and she, too, was out at work. She was housekeeper to an infirm old farmer; that is to say, she superintended the dairy and the kitchen, and received hardly as much as a cook in a London establishment. Like the sons, she was finely developed physically, and had more of the manners of a lady than seemed possible under the circumstances.

Her father's principles of farming were much the same as his plan of housekeeping and family government. It consisted of never spending any money. He bought no machines. The reaping machine was the one exception, and a bitter point with the old man. He entered on no extensive draining works, nor worried his landlord to begin them. He was content with the old tumbledown sheds till it was possible to shelter cattle in them no longer. Sometimes he was compelled to purchase a small quantity of artificial manure, but it was with extreme reluctance. He calculated to produce sufficient manure in the stalls, for he kept a large head of fattening cattle, and sheep to the greatest extent possible. He would rather

let a field lie fallow, and go without the crop from it, till nature had restored the exhausted fertility, than supply that fertility at the cost of spending money. The one guiding motto of his life was 'Save, not invest'. When once he got hold of a sovereign he parted with it no more; not though all the scientific professors in the world came to him with their analyses, and statistics, and discoveries. He put it in the bank, just as his father would have put it into a strong box under his bed. There it remained, and the interest that accrued, small as it was, was added to it.

Yet it was his pride to do his land well. He manured it well, because he kept cattle and sheep, especially the latter, to the fullest capacity of his acreage; and because, as said before, he could and did afford to let land lie fallow, when necessary. He was in no hurry. He was not anxious for so much immediate percentage upon an investment in artificial manure or steam-plough. He might have said, with a great man, 'Time and I are two.' It was Time, the slow passage of the years, that gave him his profit. He was always providing for the future; he was never out of anything, because he was never obliged to force a sale of produce in order to get the ready cash to pay the bank its interest upon borrowed money. He never borrowed; neither did he ever make a speech, or even so much as attend a farmers' club, to listen to a scientific lecture. But his teams of horses were the admiration of the countryside — no such horses came into the market town. His rent was paid punctually, and always with country banknotes — none of your clean, new-fangled cheques, or Bank of England crisp paper, but soiled, greasy country notes of small denomination.

Farmer M— never asked for a return or reduction of his rent. The neighbours said that he was cheaply rented: that was not true in regard to the land itself. But he certainly was cheaply rented if the condition of the farm was looked at. In the course of so many long years of careful farming he had got his place into such a state of cultivation that it could stand two or three bad seasons without much deterioration. The same bad seasons quite spoiled the land of such of his neighbours as had relied upon a distant application of stimulants to the soil. The stimulating substances being no longer applied, as they could not afford to buy them, the land fell back and appeared poor.

Farmer M—, of course, grumbled at the weather, but the crops

belied his lips. He was, in fact, wealthy – not the wealth that is seen in cities, but rich for a countryman. He could have started both his sons in business with solid capital. Yet he drank small beer which the reapers despised, and drove about in a rusty old gig, with thousands to his credit at that old country bank. When he got home that afternoon, he carefully put away some bags of coin for the wages of the men, which he had been to fetch, and at once started out for the rickyard, to see how things were progressing. So the Honourable on the tall four-in-hand, saluted with marked emphasis the humble gig that pulled right out of the road to give him the way, and the Lady Blanche waved her hand to the dowdy in the dusty black silk with her sweetest smile. The Honourable, when he went over the farm with his breechloader, invariably came in and drank a glass of the small beer. The Lady Blanche, at least once in autumn, rode up, alighted, and drank one glass of the home-made wine with the dowdy. Her papa, the landlord, was an invalid, but he as invariably sent a splendid basket of hot-house grapes. But Farmer M— was behind the age.

Had he looked over the hedge in the evening, he might have seen a row of reapers walking down the road at the sudden sound of a jingling bell behind them, open their line, and wheel like a squad, part to the right and part to the left, to let the bicycle pass. After it had gone by they closed their rank, and trudged on towards the village. They had been at work all day, in the uplands among the corn, cutting away with their hooks low down the yellow straw. They began in the early morning, and had first to walk two miles or more up to the harvest field. Stooping, as they worked, to strike low enough, the hot sun poured his fierce rays upon their shoulders and the back of their necks. The sinews of the right arm had continually to drive the steel through straw and tough weeds entangled in the wheat. There was no shadow to sit under for luncheon, save that at the side of the shocks, where the sheaves radiated heat and interrupted the light air, so that the shadow was warmer than the sunshine. Coarse cold bacon and bread, cheese, and a jar of small beer, or a tin can of weak cold tea, were all they had to supply them with fresh strength for further labour.

At last the evening came, the jackets so long thrown aside were resumed, and the walk home began. After so many hours of wear-

some labour it was hardly strange that their natural senses were dulled – that they did not look about them, nor converse gaily. By mutual, if unexpressed consent, they intended to call at the wayside inn when they reached it, to rest on the hard bench outside, and take a quart of stronger ale. Thus trudging homewards after that exhausting day, they did not hear the almost silent approach of the bicycle behind till the rider rang his bell. When he had passed, the rider worked his feet faster, and swiftly sped away along the dry and dusty road. He was a tall young gentleman, whose form was well set off and shown by the tight-fitting bicycle costume. He rode well and with perfect command – the track left in the dust was straight, there was no wobbling or uncertainty.

‘That be a better job than ourn, you,’ said one of the men, as they watched the bicycle rapidly proceeding ahead.

‘Ay,’ replied his mate, ‘he be a vine varmer, he be.’

Master Phillip, having a clear stretch of road, put on his utmost speed, and neither heard the comments made upon him, nor would have cared if he had. He was in haste, for he was late, and feared every minute to hear the distant dinner bell. It was his vacation, and Master Phillip, having temporarily left his studies, was visiting a gentleman who had taken a country mansion and shooting for the season. His host had accumulated wealth in the ‘city’, and naturally considered himself an authority on country matters. Master Phillip’s ‘Governor’ was likewise in a large way of business, and possessed of wealth, and thought it the correct thing for one of his sons to ‘go in’ for agriculture – a highly genteel occupation, if rightly followed, with capital and intelligence. Phillip liked to ride his bicycle in the cool of the evening, and was supposed in these excursions to be taking a survey of the soil and the crops, and to be comparing the style of agriculture in the district to that to which he had been trained while pursuing his studies. He slipped past the wayside inn; he glided by the cottages and gardens at the outskirts of the village; and then, leaving the more thickly inhabited part on one side, went by a rickyard. Men were busy in the yard putting up the last load of the evening, and the farmer in his shirt-sleeves was working among and directing the rest. The bicyclist without a glance rode on, and shortly after reached the lodge gates. They were open, in anticipation of his arrival.

He rode up the long drive, across the park, under the old elms, and alighted at the mansion before the dinner-bell rang, much to his relief; for his host had more than one daughter, and Phillip liked to arrange his toilet to perfection before he joined the society. His twenty-five guinea dressing-case, elaborately fitted up – too completely, indeed, for he had no use for the razor – soon enabled him to trim and prepare for the dining-room. His five-guinea coat, elegant studs, spotless shirt and wristbands, valuable seal ring on one finger, patent leather boots, keyless watch, eye-glass, gold toothpick in one pocket, were all carefully selected, and in the best possible style. Mr Phillip – he would have scorned the boyish ‘master’ – was a gentleman, from the perfumed locks above to the polished patent leather below. There was *ton* in his very air, in the ‘ah, ah,’ of his treble London tone of voice, the antithesis of the broad country bass. He had a firm belief in the fitness of things – in the unities, so to speak, of suit, action, and time.

When his team were struggling to force the ball by kick, or other permitted means across the tented field, Phillip was arrayed in accurate football costume. When he stood on the close-mown lawn within the white-marked square of tennis and faced the net, his jacket was barred or striped with scarlet. Then there was the bicycle-dress, the morning-coat, the shooting jacket, and the dinner-coat, not to mention the Ulster or Connaught overcoat, the dust-coat, and minor items innumerable. Whether Phillip rolled in the mire at football, or bestrode a bicycle, or sat down to snow-white tablecloth and napkin, he conscientiously dressed the part. The very completeness of his prescribed studies – the exhaustive character of the curriculum – naturally induced a frame of mind not to be satisfied with anything short of absolute precision, and perhaps even apt to extend itself to dilettantism.

Like geology, the science of agriculture is so vast, it embraces so wide a range, that one really hardly knows where it begins or ends. Phillip’s knowledge was universal. He understood all about astronomy, and had prepared an abstract of figures proving the connection of sun-spots, rainfall, and the price of wheat. Algebra was the easiest and at the same time the most accurate mode of conducting the intricate calculations arising out of the complicated question of food – of flesh formers and heat generators – that is to say, how much a sheep is increased in weight by gnawing a turnip.

Nothing could be more useful than botany – those who could not distinguish between a dicotyledon and a monocotyledon could certainly never rightly grasp the nature of a hedgerow. *Bellis perennis* and *Sinapsis arvensis* were not to be confounded, and *Triticum repens* was a sure sign of a bad farmer. Chemistry proved that too small a quantity of silicate made John Barleycorn weak in the knee; ammonia, animal phosphates, nitrogen, and so on, were mere names to many ignorant folk. The various stages and the different developments of insect life were next to be considered.

As to the soil and strata – the very groundwork of a farm – geology was the true guide to the proper selection of suitable seed. Crops had been garnered by the aid of the electric light, the plough had been driven by the Gramme machine; electricity, then, would play a foremost part in future farming, and should be studied with enthusiasm. Without mathematics nothing could be done; without ornithological study, how know which bird revelled on grain and which destroyed injurious insects? Spectrum analysis detected the adulteration of valuable compounds; the photographer recorded the exact action of the trotting horse; the telephone might convey orders from one end of an estate to the other; and thus you might go through the whole alphabet, the whole cyclopaedia of science, and apply every single branch to agriculture.

It is to be hoped that Phillip's conversational account of his studies has been correctly reproduced here. The chemical terms look rather weak, but the memory of an ordinary listener can hardly be expected to retain such a mass of technicalities. He had piles of strongly-bound books, the reward of successful examinations, besides diplomas and certificates of proficiency. These subjects could be pursued under cover, but there was besides the field work, which had a more practical sound; model farms to be visited; steam-engines to be seen at work; lectures to be listened to on the spot; deep-drainage operations, a new drill, or a new sheaf-binder to be looked at. Then there were the experimental plots – something like the little parterres seen at the edge of lawns.

One plot was sown without manure, another was sown with manure, a third had a different kind of manure. The dozen man-golds grown in one patch were pulled up and carefully weighed. The grains of wheat in an ear standing in an adjacent patch were counted and recorded. As these plots were about a yard wide, and

could be kept clean, no matter what the weather; and as a wheelbarrow load of clay, or chalk, or sand thrown down would alter the geological formation, the results obtained from them were certainly instructive, and would be very useful as a guide to the cultivation of a thousand acres. There was also a large, heavy iron roller, which the scholars could if they chose drag round and round the gravel path.

Architecture, again, touches the agriculturist early. He requires buildings for the pigs, cattle, horses, labourers, engine and machinery, lastly, for himself. Out of doors almost any farm-house that could be visited might be made by a lecturer an illustrative example of what ought to be avoided. Scarcely one could be found that was not full of mistakes – utterly wrong, and erected regardless of design and utility. Within doors, with ink, tracing paper, compasses, straight-edge and ruler, really valuable ground plans, front elevations, and so on, could be laid down. Altogether, with this circle of science to study, the future farmer had very hard work to face. Such exhaustive mental labour induced a certain nervousness that could only be allayed by relaxation. The bicycle afforded a grateful change. Mounted upon the slender, swift-revolving wheel, Mr Phillip in the cool of the evening, after a long day of study, sometimes proceeded to stretch his limbs. The light cigar soothed his weary and over-strained mind.

The bicycle by-and-by, as if drawn by the power of gravitation, approached more and more nearly to the distant town. It threaded the streets, and finally stopped in the archway of an inn. There, leaned against the wall, under the eye of the respectful ostler, the bicycle reposed. The owner strolled upstairs, and in the company of choice spirits studied the laws of right angles, of motion, and retarding friction, upon the level surface of the billiard table. Somewhere in a not much frequented street there could be seen a small window in which a coloured plate of fashion was always displayed. There were also some bonnets, trimmings, and tasteful feathers. Nothing could be more attractive than this window. The milliner was young and pretty, and seemed to have a cousin equally young and pretty. Poor, lonely, friendless creatures, it was not surprising they should welcome a little flirtation. The bicycle which so swiftly carries the young man of the present day beyond the penetrating view of his aunt or tutor has much to answer for.

But, as pointed out previously, such exhaustive scientific training naturally tends to make the mind mathematical. It cannot be satisfied unless its surroundings – the substantial realization of the concrete – are perfect. So Mr Phillip had a suit for every purpose – for football, cricket, tennis, bicycle, shooting, dining, and strolling about. In the same way he possessed a perfect armoury of athletic and other useful implements. There were fine bats by the best makers for cricket, rods for trout fishing, splendid modified choke-bores, saddles, jockey caps, and so on. A gentleman like this could hardly long remain in the solitary halls of learning – society must claim him for parties, balls, dinners, and the usual round. It was understood that his ‘governor’ was a man of substantial wealth; that Phillip would certainly be placed in an extensive farm, to play the pleasant part of a gentleman farmer. People with marriageable daughters looked upon the clever scholar as a desirable addition to their drawing-rooms. Phillip, in short, found himself by degrees involved in a whirl of festivities, and was never at a loss where to go for amusement when he could obtain leave to seek relaxation. If such social adulation made him a little vain, if it led to the purchase of a twenty-five-guinea dressing-case, and to frequent consultations with the tailor, it really was not Phillip’s fault. He felt himself popular, and accepted the position.

When the vacation came, gathering up a fresh pile of grandly-bound prize books, broad sheets of diplomas, and certificates, Phillip departed to his friend’s mansion for the partridge shooting. Coming down the road on the bicycle he overtook the reapers, and sprang his bell to warn them. The reapers thought Phillip’s job better than theirs.

At dinner, while sipping his claret, Phillip delivered his opinion upon the agriculture of the district, which he had surveyed from his bicycle. It was incomplete, stationary, or retrograde. The form of the fields alone was an index to the character of the farmers who cultivated them. Not one had a regular shape. The fields were neither circles, squares, parallelograms, nor triangles. One side, perhaps, might be straight; the hedgerow on the other had a dozen curves, and came up to a point. With such irregular enclosures it was impossible that the farmer could plan out his course with the necessary accuracy. The same incompleteness ran through everything – one field was well tilled, the next indifferently, the

third full of weeds. Here was a good modern cattle-shed, well designed for the purpose; yonder was a tumble-down building, with holes in the roof and walls.

So, too, with the implements – a farmer never seemed to have a complete set. One farmer had, perhaps, a reaping machine, but he had never got an elevator; another had an elevator, but no steam-plough. No one had a full set of machinery. If they drained, they only drained one field; the entire farm was never by any possibility finished straight off. If the farmer had two new light carts of approved construction, he was sure to have three old rumbling waggons, in drawing which there was a great waste of power. Why not have all light carts? There was no uniformity. The farming mind lacked breadth of view, and dwelt too much on detail. It was not, of course, the fault of the tenants of the present day, but the very houses they inhabited were always put in the wrong place. Where the ground was low, flat, and liable to be flooded, the farm-house was always built by a brook. When the storms of winter came the brook overflowed, and the place was almost inaccessible. In hilly districts, where there was not much water, the farm-house was situated on the slope, or perhaps on the plateau above, and in summer very likely every drop of water used had to be drawn up there from a distance in tanks.

The whole of rural England, in short, wanted rearranging upon mathematical principles. To begin at the smallest divisions, the fields should be mapped out like the squares of a chessboard; next, the parishes; and, lastly, the counties. You ought to be able to work steam-ploughing tackle across a whole parish, if a rope could be made strong enough. If you talked with a farmer, you found him somehow or other quite incapable of following a logical sequence of argument. He got on very well for a few sentences, but, just as one was going to come to the conclusion, his mind seized on some little paltry detail, and refused to move any farther. He positively could not follow you to a logical conclusion. If you, for instance, tried to show him that a certain course of cropping was the correct one for certain fields, he would listen for a while, and then suddenly declare that the turnips in one of the said fields last year were a failure. That particular crop of turnips had nothing at all to do with the system at large, but the farmer could see nothing else.

What had struck him most, however, in that particular district, as he traversed it on the bicycle, was the great loss of time that must result from the absence of rapid means of communication on large farms. The distance across a large farm might, perhaps, be a mile. Some farms were not very broad, but extended in a narrow strip for a great way. Hours were occupied in riding round such farms, hours which might be saved by simple means. Suppose, for example, that a gang of labourers were at work in the harvest-field, three-quarters of a mile from the farm-house. Now, why not have a field telegraph, like that employed in military operations? The cable or wire was rolled on a drum like those used for watering a lawn. All that was needed was to harness a pony, and the drum would unroll and lay the wire as it revolved. The farmer could then sit in his office and telegraph his instructions without a moment's delay. He could tap the barometer, and wire to the bailiff in the field to be expeditious, for the mercury was falling. Practically, there was no more necessity for the farmer to go outside his office than for a merchant in Mincing Lane. The merchant did not sail in every ship whose cargo was consigned to him: why should the farmer watch every waggon loaded? Steam could drive the farmer's plough, cut the chaff, pump the water, and, in short, do everything. The field telegraph could be laid down to any required spot with the greatest ease, and thus, sitting in his office chair, the farmer could control the operations of the farm without once soiling his hands. Mr Phillip, as he concluded his remarks, reached his glass of claret, and thus incidentally exhibited his own hand, which was as white as a lady's.

CHAPTER VIII

Haymaking—‘The Juke’s Country’

A RATTLING, thumping, booming noise, like the beating of their war drums by savages, comes over the hedge where the bees are busy at the bramble flowers. The bees take no heed, they pass from flower to flower, seeking the sweet honey to store at home in the hive, as their bee ancestors did before the Roman legions marched to Cowey Stakes. Their habits have not changed; their ‘social’ relations are the same; they have not called in the aid of machinery to enlarge their liquid wealth, or to increase the facility of collecting it. There is a low murmur rather than a buzz along the hedgerow; but over it the hot summer breeze brings the thumping, rattling, booming sound of hollow metal striking against the ground or in contact with other metal. These ringing noises, which so little accord with the sweet-scented hay and green hedgerows, are caused by the careless handling of milk tins dragged hither and thither by the men who are getting the afternoon milk ready for transit to the railway station miles away. Each tin bears a brazen badge engraved with the name of the milkman who will retail its contents in distant London. It may be delivered to the countess in Belgravia, and reach her dainty lip in the morning chocolate, or it may be eagerly swallowed up by the half-starved children of some back court in the purlieus of the Seven Dials.

Sturdy milkmaids may still be seen in London, sweeping the crowded pavement clear before them as they walk with swinging tread, a yoke on their shoulders, from door to door. Some remnant of the traditional dairy thus survives in the stony streets that are separated so widely from the country. But here, beside the hay, the hedgerows, the bees, the flowers that precede the blackberries – here in the heart of the meadows the romance has departed. Everything is mechanical or scientific. From the refrigerator that cools the milk, the thermometer that tests its temperature, the

lactometer that proves its quality, all is mechanical precision. The tins themselves are metal - wood, the old country material for almost every purpose, is eschewed - and they are swung up into a waggon specially built for the purpose. It is the very antithesis of the jolting and cumbrous waggon used for generations in the hay-fields and among the corn. It is light, elegantly proportioned, painted, varnished - the work rather of a coachbuilder than a cartwright. The horse harnessed in it is equally unlike the cart-horse. A quick, wiry horse, that may be driven in a trap or gig, is the style - one that will rattle along and catch the train.

The driver takes his seat and handles the reins with the air of a man driving a tradesman's van, instead of walking, like the true old carter, or sitting on the shaft. The vehicle rattles off to the station, where ten, fifteen, or perhaps twenty such converge at the same hour, and then ensues a scene of bustle, chaff, and rough language. The tins are placed in the van specially reserved for them, the whistle sounds, the passengers - who have been wondering why on earth there was all this noise and delay at a little roadside station without so much as a visible steeple - withdraw their heads from the windows; the wheels revolve, and, gathering speed, the train disappears round the curve, hastening to the metropolis. Then the empty tins returned from town have to be conveyed home with more rattling, thumping, and booming of hollow tin - there to be carefully cleansed, for which purpose vast quantities of hot water must be ready, and coal, of course, must be consumed in proportion.

This beautiful afternoon the booming seems to sound more than usual; it may perhaps be the wind that carries the noise along. But Mr George, the farmer, who has been working among the hay-makers, steps out from the rank, and going some way aside pauses awhile to consider. You should not address him as Farmer George. Farmer as an affix is not the thing now; farmers are 'Mr So-and-So'. Not that there is any false pride about the present individual; his memory goes back too far, and he has had too much experience of the world. He leans on his prong - the sharp forks worn bright as silver from use - stuck in the sward, and his chest pressing on the top of the handle, or rather on both hands, with which he holds it. The handle makes an angle of forty-five degrees with his body, and thus gives considerable support and relief while he reflects.

He leans on his prong, facing to windward, and gazing straight into the teeth of the light breeze, as he has done these forty and odd summers past. Like the captain of a sailing ship, the eye of the master haymaker must be always watching the horizon to windward. He depends on the sky, like the mariner, and spreads his canvas and shapes his course by the clouds. He must note their varying form and drift; the height and thickness and hue; whether the distant hills are clearly defined or misty; and what the sunset portends. From the signs of the sunset he learns, like the antique Roman husbandman:

*'When the south projects a stormy day,
And when the clearing north will puff the clouds away.'*

According as the interpretation of the signs be favourable, adverse, or doubtful, so he gives his orders.

This afternoon, as he stands leaning on the prong, he marks the soft air which seems itself to be heated, and renders the shade, if you seek it for coolness, as sultry as the open field. The flies are numerous and busy – the horses can barely stand still, and nod their heads to shake them off. The hills seem near, and the trees on the summit are distinctly visible. Such noises as are heard seem exaggerated and hollow. There is but little cloud, mere thin flecks; but the horizon has a brassy look, and the blue of the sky is hard and opaque. Farmer George recollects that the barometer he tapped before coming out showed a falling mercury; he does not like these appearances, more especially the heated breeze. There is a large quantity of hay in the meadow, much of it quite ready for carting, indeed, the waggons are picking it up as fast as they can, and the rest, if left spread about through next day – Sunday – would be fit on Monday.

On Sunday there are no wages to pay to the labourers; but the sun, if it shines, works as hard and effectually as ever. It is always a temptation to the haymaker to leave his half-made hay spread about for Sunday, so that on Monday morning he may find it made. Another reason why he hesitates is because he knows he will have trouble with the labourers, who will want to be off early as it is Saturday. They are not so ready to work an hour or two overtime as when he was a boy. On the other hand, he recollects that the weather cablegrams from America foretell the arrival of a depres-

sion. What would his grandfather have thought of adjusting the work in an English meadow to the tenour of news from the other side of the Atlantic?

Suddenly, while he ponders, there arises a shout from the labourers. The hay in one spot, as if seized by an invisible force, lifts itself up and revolves round and round, rising higher every turn. A miniature cyclone is whirling it up - a column of hay twisting in a circle and rising above the trees. Then the force of the whirlwind spends itself; some of the hay falls on the oaks, and some drifts with the breeze across the field before it sinks.

This decides him at once. He resolves to have all the hay carted that he can, and the remainder put up into haystacks. The men grumble when they hear it; perhaps a year ago they would have openly mutinied, and refused to work beyond the usual hour. But, though wages are still high, the labourers feel that they are not so much the masters as they were - they grumble, but obey. The haystacks are put up, and the rick-cloth unfolded over the partly made rick. Farmer George himself sees to it that the cloth does not touch the rick at the edges, or the rain, if it comes, will go through instead of shooting off, and that the ropes are taut and firmly belayed. His caution is justified in the night by a violent thunderstorm, and in the morning it is raining steadily.

It rains again on Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday. Thursday it does not rain, but the hedges are wet, the ground is soaked, the grass hung with raindrops, the sky heavy with masses of drifting cloud. The hay cannot be touched; it must lie a day till sufficiently dry. Friday is more hopeful. He walks out into the fields, and kicks a haystack half over. The hay is still wet, but he congratulates himself that not much damage is done. Saturday is warm and fine - work goes on again. But Sunday is near. Sunday is fiery hot. Monday, the rain pours down with tropical vehemence.

Thus the monotonous, heart-breaking days go by and lengthen into weeks, and the weeks extend into months. The wheat is turning colour, and still the hay lies about, and the farmer has ceased even to tap the barometer. Those fields that are not cut are brown as brown can be - the grass has seeded and is over ripe. The labourers come every day, and some trifling job is found for them - the garden path is weeded, the nettles cut, and such little matters done. Their wages are paid every week in silver and gold

— harvest wages, for which no stroke of harvest work has been done. He must keep them on, because any day the weather may brighten, and then they will be wanted. But the weather does not brighten, and the drain of ready cash continues. Besides the men, the mowing machine is idle in the shed. Even if the rain ceases, the crops are so laid that it is doubtful if it can be employed. The horse-rake is idle, the elevator is idle, the hay-making machine is idle, and these represent capital, if not to a large amount. He notes the price of hay at the market. For months past it has been low — so low that it has hardly paid him to sell that portion of old hay which he felt he could spare. From October of last year to June of this (1879) the price remained about the same. It is now rising, but he has no more old hay to part with, and the new is not yet made. He has to bear in mind that his herd of cows has to be kept in high feed all the winter, to supply an unvarying quantity of milk to the London purchaser.

These wet days, forcing him unwillingly to stay within doors, send him to his books and accounts, and they tell a story somewhat at variance with the prevalent belief that dairy-farming is the only branch of farming that is still profitable. First, as to the milk-selling. Cows naturally yield a larger supply in the summer than in winter, but by the provisions of the contract between the farmer and the milkman the quantity sent in summer is not to exceed, and the quantity in winter not to fall short of, a stipulated amount. The price received in summer is about five-pence or fivepence-halfpenny per imperial gallon, afterwards retailed in London at about one shilling and eightpence. When the cost of conveyance to the station, of the horses, of the wear and tear, of the men who have to be paid for doing nothing else but look after the milk, is deducted, the profit to the farmer is but small. He thinks, too, that he notices a decided falling-off in the demand for milk even at this price.

Some dairies find a difficulty in disposing of the milk — they cannot find a purchaser. He has himself a considerable surplus over and above what the contract allows him to send. This must either be wasted entirely or made into butter and cheese. In order to make cheese, the plant, the tubs, vats, presses, and so on, must be kept in readiness, and there must be an experienced person to superintend the work. This person must be paid a salary, and

lodge and board in the house, representing therefore a considerable outlay. The chéese, when made and sent to market, fluctuates of course in price: it may be as low as fourpence a pound wholesale; it may go as high as sixpence. Fourpence a pound wholesale will not pay for the making; sixpence will leave a profit; but of late the price has gone rather to the lower than the higher figure. A few years since, when the iron industries flourished, this kind of cheese had a good and ready sale, and there was a profit belonging to it; but since the iron trade has been in so depressed a condition this cheese has sold badly. The surplus milk consequently brings no profit, and is only made into cheese because it shall not be wasted, and in the hope that possibly a favourable turn of the cheese market may happen. Neither the summer cheese nor the summer milk is bringing him in a fortune.

Meantime the hay is spoiling in the fields. But a few years ago, when agricultural prices were inflated, and men's minds were full of confidence, he recollects seeing standing grass crops sold by auction for £5 the acre, and in some cases even higher prices were realized. This year similar auctions of standing grass crops hardly realized 30s. an acre, and in some instances a purchaser could not be found even at that price. The difference in the value of grass represented by these prices is very great.

He has no pigs to sell, because, for a long while past, he has had nothing upon which to feed them, the milk being sold. The pigsties are full of weeds; he can hardly fatten one for his own use, and has scarcely better facilities for keeping pigs than an agricultural labourer. The carriage of the milk to the station requires at least two quick horses, and perhaps more; one cannot do it twice a day, even with a very moderate load. The hard highway and the incessant work would soon knock a single horse up. The mowing machine and the horse-rake must be drawn by a similar horse, so that the dairy farm may be said to require a style of horse like that employed by omnibus proprietors. The acreage being limited, he can only keep a certain number of horses, and, therefore, has no room for a brood mare.

Farmer George is aware that nothing now pays like a brood cart mare with fair good luck. The colt born in April is often sold six months afterwards, in September, for £20 or £25, and even up to £30, according to excellence. The value of cart-horse colts

has risen greatly, and those who are fortunately able to maintain a brood mare have reaped the profit. But Mr George, selling the milk, and keeping a whole stud of nags for the milk cart, the mowing machine, the horse-rake, and so forth, cannot maintain a brood mare as well. In the winter, it is true, the milk may sell for as high a price as 10*d.* per gallon of four quarts, but then he has a difficulty in procuring the quantity contracted for, and may perhaps have to buy of neighbours to keep up the precise supply.

His herd must also be managed for the purpose, and must be well fed, and he will probably have to buy food for them in addition to his hay. The nag horses, too, that draw the milk waggon, have to be fed during the winter, and are no slight expense. As for fattening a beast in a stall, with a view to take the prize at Christmas at the local show, he has abandoned that, finding that it costs more to bring the animal up to the condition required than he can afterwards sell it for. There is no profit in that. America presses upon him hard, too – as hard, or harder, than on the wheat-grower. Cases have been known of American cheese being sold in manufacturing towns as low as 2*d.* per pound retail – given away by despairing competition.

How, then, is the dairyman to succeed when he cannot, positively cannot, make cheese to sell at less than 4*d.* per pound wholesale? Of course such instances are exceptional, but American cheese, is usually sold a penny or more a pound below the English ordinary, and this cuts the ground from under the dairyman's feet; and the American cheese too is acquiring a reputation for richness, and, price for price, surpasses the English in quality. Some people who have long cherished a prejudice against the American have found, upon at last being induced to try the two, that the Canadian cheddar is actually superior to the English cheddar, the English selling at 10*d.* per pound and the Canadian at 7*d.*

Mr George finds he pays a very high rent for his grassland – some 50*s.* per acre – and upon reckoning up the figures in his account-books heaves a sigh. His neighbours perchance may be making fortunes, though they tell quite a different tale, but he feels that he is not growing rich. The work is hard, or rather it is continuous. No one has to attend to his duties so regularly all the year round as the man who looks after cows. They cannot be left

a single day from the 1st of January to the 31st of December. Nor is the social state of things altogether pleasant to reflect on. His sons and daughters have all left home; not one would stay and take to the dairy work. They have gone into the towns, and found more congenial employment there. He is himself growing in years. His wife, having once left off making cheese when the milk selling commenced, and having tasted the sweets of rest, is unwilling to return to that hard labour. When it is done he must pay someone to do it.

In every way ready money is going out of the house. Cash to pay the haymakers idling about in the sheds out of the rain; cash to pay the men who manage the milk; cash to pay the woman who makes the cheese out of the surplus milk; cash to pay the blacksmith for continually re-shoeing the milk-cart nags and for mending machines; cash to pay the brewer and the butcher and the baker, neither of whom took a sovereign here when he was a lad, for his father ate his own bacon, brewed his own beer, and baked his own bread; cash to pay for the education of the cottagers' children; cash, a great deal of cash, to pay the landlord.

Mr George, having had enough of his accounts, rises and goes to the window. A rain cloud sweeping along the distant hills has hidden them from sight, and the rack hurries overhead driven before the stormy wind. There comes a knock at the door. It is the collector calling the second time for the poor rates, which have grown heavier of late.

But, however, delayed, the haymaking is finished at last, and by-and-by, when the leaves have fallen and the hunting commences, a good run drives away for the time at least the memory of so unpropitious a season. Then Mr George some mild morning forms one of a little group of well-mounted farmers waiting at a quiet corner while the hounds draw a great wood. Two of them are men long past middle age, whose once tawny beards are grizzled, but who are still game, perhaps more so than the rising generation. The rest have followed them here, aware that these old hands know every inch of the country, and are certain to be in the right place. The spot is not far from the park wall, where the wood runs up into a wedge-shaped point, and ends in a low mound and hedge. Most of the company at the meet in the park have naturally cantered across the level sward, scattering the sheep as they go, and are now assembled along the side of the wood, near

where a green 'drive' goes through it, and apparently gives direct access to the fields beyond. From thence they can see the huntsman in the wood occasionally, and trace the exact course the hounds are taking in their search.

A gallant show it is by the wood! Horsemen and horsewomen, late comers hastening up, restless horses, a throng for ever in motion, and every now and then the blast of a horn rising up from the trees beneath. A gallant show indeed, but the two old cunning ones and their followers have slipped away down to this obscure corner, where they can see nothing of it, and are themselves hidden. They know that the wood is triangular in shape, and that from this, the apex, they have merely to pass the low hedge in front, and, turning to the left, ride along the lower side, and so bisect the course the fox will probably take. They know that the 'drive', which offers so straight and easy a descent through the wood from the park, is pleasant enough till the lower ground is reached. There the soft, oozy earth, which can never dry under the trees, is poached into a slough through which even timber carriages cannot be drawn. Nor can a horseman slip aside, because of the ash poles and thorn thickets. Those who are trapped there must return to the park and gallop all round the wood outside, unless they like to venture a roll in that liquid mud. Anyone can go to a meet, but to know all the peculiarities of the covers is only given to those who have ridden over the country these forty years. In this corner a detached copse of spruce fir keeps off the wind – the direction of which they have noted – and in this shelter it is almost warm.

The distant crack of a whip, the solitary cry of a hound, a hollow shout, and similar sounds, come frequently, and now and then there is an irrepressible stir in the little group as they hear one of the many false alarms that always occur in drawing a great wood. To these noises they are keenly sensitive, but utterly ignore the signs of other life around them. A pheasant, alarmed by the hounds comes running quietly, thinking to escape into the line of isolated copses that commences here; but, suddenly confronted by the horsemen just outside, rises with an uproar, and goes sailing down over the fields. Two squirrels, happy in the mild weather, frisk out of the copse into the dank grass, till a curvet of one of the horses frightens them up into the firs again.

Horses and men are becoming impatient. 'That dalled keeper has left an earth open,' remarks one of the riders. His companion points with his whip at the hedge just where it joins the wood. A long slender muzzle is thrust for a moment cautiously over the bare sandy mound under cover of a thorn stole. One sniff, and it is withdrawn. The fox thought also to steal away along the copses, the worst and most baffling course he could choose. Five minutes afterwards, and there is this time no mistake. There comes from the park above the low, dull, rushing roar of hundreds of hoofs, that strike the sward together, and force by sheer weight the reluctant earth to resound. The two old hands lead over the hedge, and the little company, slipping along below the wood, find themselves well on the track, far in front of the main body. There is a block in the treacherous 'drive', those who were foremost struggling to get back, and those behind struggling to come down. The rest at last, learning the truth, are galloping round the outside, and taking it out of their horses before they get on the course at all.

It is a splendid burst, and the pace is terrible. The farmers' powerful horses find it heavy going across the fresh ploughed furrows and the wet 'squishey' meadows, where the double mounds cannot be shirked. Now a lull, and the two old hands, a little at fault, make for the rising ground, where are some ricks, and a threshing machine at work, thinking from thence to see over the tall hedgerows. Upon the rick the labourers have stopped work, and are eagerly watching the chase, for from that height they can see the whole field. Yonder the main body have found a succession of fields with the gates all open: some carting is in progress, and the gates have been left open for the carter's convenience. A hundred horsemen and eight or ten ladies are galloping in an extended line along this route, when the hounds are quiet, that they may be ready when the chiding recommences.

Suddenly the labourers exclaim and point, the hounds open, and the farmers, knowing from the direction they point where to ride, are off. But this time the fox has doubled, so that the squadrons hitherto behind are now the closest up, and the farmers in the rear: thus the fortunes of war changes, and the race is not to the swift. The labourers on the rick, which stands on the side of a hill, are fully as excited as the riders, and they can see what the hunter himself rarely views, i.e. the fox slipping ahead before the hounds.

Then they turn to alternatively laugh at, and shout directions to a disconsolate gentleman, who, ignorant of the district, is pounded in a small meadow. He is riding frantically round and round, afraid to risk the broad brook which encircles it, because of the treacherous bank, and maddened by the receding sound of the chase. A boy gets off the rick and runs to earn sixpence by showing a way out. So from the rick Hodge has his share of the sport, and at that elevation can see over a wide stretch of what he – changing the ‘d’ into a ‘j’ – calls ‘the juke’s country’.

It is a famous land. There are spaces, which on the map look large, and yet have no distinctive character, no individuality as it were. Such broad expanses of plain and vale are usefully employed in the production of cattle and corn. Villages, hamlets, even towns are dotted about them, but a list of such places would not contain a single name that would catch the eye. Though occupying so many square miles, the district, so far as the world is concerned, is non-existent. It is socially a blank. But ‘the juke’s country’ is a well-known land. There are names connected with it which are familiar not only in England, but all the world over, where men – and where do they not? – converse of sport. Something beyond mere utility, beyond ploughing and sowing, has given it within its bounds a species of separate nationality. The personal influence of an acknowledged leader has organized society and impressed it with a quiet enthusiasm. Even the bitterest Radical forgives the patrician who shoots or rides exceptionally well, and hunting is a pursuit which brings the peer and the commoner side by side.

The agricultural population speak as one man upon the subject. The old farmer will tell you with pride how his advice was sought when disease entered the kennels, and how his remedy saved the lives of valuable hounds. The farmer’s son, a mere lad, whose head barely rises to his saddle, talks of ‘the duke’ as his hero. This boy knows the country, and can ride straight, better than many a gentleman with groom and second horse behind. Already, like his elders, he looks forward impatiently to the fall of the leaf. The tenants’ wives and daughters allude with pleasure to the annual social gatherings at the mansion, and it is apparent that something like a real bond exists between landlord and tenant. No false pride separates the one from the other – intercourse is easy,

for a man of high and ancient lineage can speak freely to the humblest labourer without endangering his precedence. It needs none of the parvenu's hauteur and pomp to support his dignity. Every tenant is treated alike.

On small estates there is sometimes a complaint that the largest tenant is petted while the lesser are harshly treated. Nothing of that is known here. The tenants are as well content as it is possible for men to be who are passing under the universal depression. *Noblesse oblige* - it would be impossible for that ancient house to stoop to meanness. The head rides to the hunt, as his ancestors rode to battle, with a hundred horsemen behind him. His colours are like the cockades of olden times. Once now and then even Royalty honours the meet with its presence. Round that ancient house the goodwill of the county gathers; and when any family event - as a marriage - takes place, the hearty congratulations offered come from far beyond the actual property. His pastime is not without its use - all are agreed that hunting really does improve the breed of horses. Certainly it gives a life, a go, a social movement to the country which nothing else imparts.

It is a pleasant land withal - a land of hill and vale, of wood and copse. How well remembered are the copses on the hills, and the steeples, those time-honoured landmarks to wandering riders! The small meadows with double mounds have held captive many a stranger. The river that winds through them enters by-and-by a small but ancient town, with its memories of the fierce Danes, and its present talk of the hunt. About five o'clock on winter afternoons there is a clank of spurs in the courtyard of the old inn, and the bar is crowded with men in breeches and top-boots. As they refresh themselves there is a ceaseless hum of conversation, how so-and-so came a cropper, how another went at the brook in style, or how some poor horse got staked and was mercifully shot. A talk, in short, like that in camp after a battle, of wounds and glory. Most of these men are tenant farmers, and reference is sure to be made to the price of cheese, and the forthcoming local agricultural show.

This old market town has been noted for generations as a great cheese centre. It is not, perhaps, the most convenient situation for such a market, and its population is inconsiderable; but the trade is, somehow or other, a tradition of the place, and traditions are hard to shake. Efforts have been made to establish rival markets in towns

nearer to the modern resorts of commerce, but in vain. The attempt has always proved a failure, and to this day the prices quoted at this place rule those of the adjoining counties, and are watched in distant cities. The depression made itself felt here in a very practical manner, for prices fell to such an extent that the manufacture of the old style of cheese became almost a dead loss. Some farmers abandoned it, and at much trouble and expense changed their system, and began to produce Cheddar and Stilton. But when the Stilton was at last ready, there was no demand for it. Almost suddenly, however, and quite recently, a demand sprang up, and the price of that cheese rose. They say here in the bar that this probably saved many from difficulties; large stocks that had been lying on hand unsaleable for months going off at a good price. They hope that it is an omen of returning prosperity, and do not fail to observe the remarkable illustration it affords of the close connection between trade and agriculture. For no sooner did the iron trade revive than the price of cheese responded. The elder men cannot refrain from chuckling over the altered tone of the inhabitants of cities towards the farmers. 'Years ago,' they say, 'we were held up to scorn, and told that we were quite useless; there was nothing so contemptible as the British farmer. Now they have discovered that, after all, we are some good, and even Manchester sympathizes with us.'

It is now hoped that the forthcoming local show – largely patronized and promoted by the chief of the hunting field – will be better than was at one time anticipated. Those who would like to see the real working of an agricultural show such as this should contrive to visit the yard early in the morning of the opening day, some few hours before the public are admitted. The bustle, the crush of excited exhibitors, the cries of men in charge of cattle, the apparently inextricable confusion, as if everything had been put off to the last moment – the whole scene is intensely agricultural. Everyone is calling for the secretary. A drover wants to know where to put his fat cattle; a carter wants to know where a great cart-horse is to stand – he and his horse together are hopelessly floundering about in the crowd. The agent of a firm of implement manufacturers has a telegram that another machine is coming, and is anxious for extra space; the representative of an artificial manure factory is vainly seeking a parcel that has got

mislaid. The seedsman requires permission to somewhat shift his stall; wherever is the secretary?

When he appears, a clergyman at once pounces on him, to apply for tickets to the dinner, and is followed by a farmer, who must have a form and an explanation how to fill it up. One of his labourers has decided at the last minute to enter for a prize - he has had a year to make up his mind in. A crowd of members of the Society are pushing round for a private view, and watching the judges at their work. They all turn to the secretary to ask where such and such an exhibit may be found, and demand why on earth the catalogues are not ready? Mr Secretary, a stout tenant farmer, in breeches and top-boots, whose broad face beams with good nature (selected, perhaps, for that very quality), pants and wipes his forehead, for, despite the cold, the exertion and the universal flurry have made him quite hot. He gives every inquirer a civil answer, and affably begs the eager folk that press upon him to come up into the committee-room.

At this a satisfied smile replaces the troubled expression upon their faces. They feel that their difficulties are at an end; they have got hold of the right man at last - there is something soothing in the very sound of the committee-room. When they get up into this important apartment they find it quite empty. There is a blazing fire in the grate, and littered on the long table is a mass of forms, letters, lists, and proofs of the catalogue waiting for the judges' decision to be entered. After half an hour or so their hopes begin to fall, and possibly someone goes down to try and haul the secretary up into his office. The messenger finds that much-desired man in the midst of an excited group; one has him by the arm pulling him forward, another by the coat dragging him back, a third is bawling at him at the top of a powerful voice.

By-and-by, however, the secretary comes panting up into the committee-room with a letter in his hand and a pleased expression on his features. He announces, that he has just had a note from his Grace, who, with his party, will be here early, and who hopes that all is going on well. Then to business, and it is surprising how quickly he disposes of it. A farmer himself, he knows exactly what is wanted, and gives the right order without a moment's hesitation. It is no new experience to him, and despite all this apparent confusion, everything presently falls into its place.

After the opening of the show there is a meeting, at which certain prizes are distributed, among them rewards to the best ploughman in the 'juke's country', and to those labourers who have remained longest in the service of one master. For the graceful duty of presentation a marchioness has been selected, who, with other visitors of high social rank, has come over from that famous hunting mansion. To meet that brilliant party the whole agricultural interest has assembled. The room is crowded with tenant farmers, the entire hunting field is present. Every clergyman in the district is here, together with the gentry, and many visitors for the hunting season. Among them, shoulder to shoulder, are numbers of agricultural labourers, their wives, and daughters, dressed in their best for the occasion. After some speeches, a name is called, and an aged labourer steps forward.

His grandchildren are behind him; two of his sons, quite elderly themselves, attend him almost to the front, so that he may have to make but a few steps unsupported. The old man is frosted with age, and moves stiffly, like a piece of mechanism rather than a living creature, nor is there any expression – neither smile nor interest – upon his absolutely immobile features. He wears breeches and gaiters, and a blue coat cut in the style of two generations since. There is a small clear space in the midst of the well-dressed throng. There he stands, and for the moment the hum is hushed.

For sixty years that old man laboured upon one farm; sixty years of ploughing and sowing, sixty harvests. What excitement, what discoveries and inventions – with what giant strides the world has progressed while he quietly followed the plough! An acknowledgment has been publicly awarded to him for that long and faithful service. He puts forth his arm; his dry, horny fingers are crooked, and he can neither straighten nor bend them. Not the least sign appears upon his countenance that he is even conscious of what is passing. There is a quick flash of jewelled rings ungloved to the light, and the reward is placed in that claw-like grasp by the white hand of the marchioness.

Not all the gallant cavalry of the land fearlessly charging hedge and brook can, however, repel the invasion of a foe mightier than their chief. Frost sometimes comes and checks their gaiety. Snow falls, and levels every furrow, and then Hodge going to his work

in the morning can clearly trace the track of one of his most powerful masters, Squire Reynard, who has been abroad in the night, and, likely enough, throttled the traditional grey goose. The farmer watches for the frozen thatch to drip; the gentleman visiting the stable looks up disconsolately at the icicles dependent from the slated eave with the same hope. The sight of a stray seagull wandering inland is gladly welcomed, as the harbinger of drenching clouds sweeping up on soft south-westerly gales from the nearest coast.

The hunt is up once more, and so short are the hours of the day in the dead of the year, that early night often closes round the chase. From out of the gloom and the mist comes the distant note of the horn, with a weird and old-world sound. By-and-by the labourer, trudging homeward, is overtaken by a hunter whose horse's neck droops with weariness. His boots are splashed with mud, his coat torn by the thorns. He is a visitor, vainly trying to find his way home, having come some ten or fifteen miles across country since the morning. The labourer shows the route – the longest way round is the shortest at night – and as they go listens eagerly to the hunter's tale of the run. At the cross roads they part with mutual goodwill towards each other, and a shilling, easily earned, pays that night for the cottager's pipe and glass of ale.

CHAPTER IX

The Fine Lady Farmer—Country Girls

A PAIR of well-matched bays in silver-plated harness, and driven by a coachman in livery, turns an easy curve round a corner of the narrow country road, forcing you to step on the sward by the crimson-leaved bramble bushes, and sprinkling the dust over the previously glossy surface of the newly fallen horse-chestnuts. Two ladies, elegantly dressed, lounge in the carriage with that graceful idleness – that indifferent indolence – only to be acquired in an atmosphere of luxury. Before they pass out of sight round another turn of the road it is possible to observe that one at least possesses hair of the fashionable hue, and a complexion delicately brilliant – whether wholly natural or partly aided by art. The other must be pronounced a shade less rich in the colours of youth, but is perhaps even more expensively dressed. An experienced observer would at once put them down as mother and daughter, as, indeed, they are.

The polished spokes of the wheels glitter in the sun, the hoofs of the high-stepping pair beat the firm road in regular cadence, and smoothly the carriage rolls on till the brown beech at the corner hides it. But a sense of wealth, of social station, and refinement – strange and in strong contrast to the rustic scene – lingers behind, like a faint odour of perfume. There are the slow teams pulling stolidly at the ploughs – they were stopped, of course, for the carters to stare at the equipage; there are the wheat ricks; yonder a lone farmstead, and black cattle grazing in the pasture. Surely the costly bays, whose hoofs may even now be heard, must belong to the lordly owner of these broad acres – this undulating landscape of grass and stubble, which is not beautiful, but evidently fertile!

A very brief inquiry at the adjacent market town disposes of this natural conclusion. It is the carriage of a tenant farmer – but what a tenant! The shopkeepers here are eloquent, positively gratefully

eloquent, in the praise of his wife and daughter. Customers! – no such customers had been known in the old borough from time immemorial. The tradesman as he speaks involuntarily pulls out his till, glances in, and shuts it with a satisfied bang. The old style of farmer, solid and substantial enough, fumbling at the bottom of his canvas bag for silver and gold, was a crusty curmudgeon where silk and satin, kid gloves and so forth were concerned. His wife had to look sharp after her poultry, geese, and turkeys, and such similar perquisites, in order to indulge in any innocent vanity, notwithstanding that the rent was paid and a heavy balance at the bank.

Then he would have such a length of credit – a year at least – and nowadays a shopkeeper, though sure of his money, cannot wait long for it. But to ask for the account would give mortal offence. The bill would be paid with the remark, intended to be intensely sarcastic, ‘Suppose you thought we was a-going to run away – eh?’ and the door would never again be darkened by those antique breeches and gaiters. As for the common run of ordinary farmers, their wives bought a good deal, but wanted it cheap, and, looking at the low price of corn and the ‘paper’ there was floating about, it did not do to allow a long bill to be run up. But the Grange people – ah! the Grange people put some life into the place. ‘Money! they must have heaps of money (lowering his voice to a whisper). Why, Mrs — brought him a fortune, sir; why, she’s got a larger income than our squire (as if it were rank treason to say so). Mr — has got money too, and, bless you, they holds their heads as high as their landlord’s, and good reason they should. They spend as much in a week as the squire do in a month, and don’t cheapen nothing, and your cheque just whenever you like to ask for it. That’s what I calls gentlefolks.’ For till and counter gauge long descent, and heraldic quarterings, and ancestral Crusaders, far below the chink of ready money, that synonym for all the virtues.

The Grange people, indeed, are so conspicuous, that there is little secrecy about them or their affairs. The house they reside in – it cannot be called a farmstead – is a large villa-like mansion of recent erection, and fitted with every modern convenience. The real farmstead which it supplanted lies in a hollow at some distance, and is occupied by the head bailiff, for there are several employed. As the architecture of the villa is consonant with modern ‘taste’, so

too the interior is furnished in the 'best style', of course under the supervision of the mistress. Mrs — has filled it with rosewood and ormolu, with chairs completely gilt, legs, back, seat, and all, with luxurious ottomans, 'occasional' tables inlaid with mother-o'-pearl, soft carpets, polished brazen grate-fittings, semi-ecclesiastical, semi-medieval, and so forth.

Everywhere the glitter of glass, mirrors over the mantelpieces, mirrors let into panels, glass chiffoniers, and pendent prisms of glass round the ornamental candlesticks. Mixed with this some of the latest productions of the new English Renaissance — stiff, straight-back, plain oak chairs, such as men in armour may have used — together with Japanese screens. In short, just such a medley of artistic styles as may be seen in scores of suburban villas where money is of little account, and even in houses of higher social pretensions. There is the usual illustrated dining-room literature, the usual bric-a-brac, the usual cabinet series of poets. There are oil paintings on the walls; there is an immense amount of the most expensive electro-plate on the dinner table; the toilet accessories in the guest chambers are 'elegant' and *recherché*. The upholsterer has not been grudging.

For Mrs — is the daughter of a commercial man, one of the principals of a great firm, and has been accustomed to these things from her youth upwards. She has no sympathies with the past, that even yet is loth to quit its hold of the soil and of those who are bred upon it. The ancient simplicity and plainness of country life are positively repulsive to her; she associates them with poverty. Her sympathies are with warm, well-lighted rooms, full of comfort, shadowless because of the glare of much gas. She is not vulgar, just the reverse — she is a thorough lady, but she is not of the country and its traditions. She is the city and the suburb transplanted to the midst of corn, and grass, and cattle. She has her maid, skilled in the toilet, her carriage and pair and pony carriage, grooms, footmen, just exactly as she would have done had she brought her magnificent dowry to a villa at Sydenham.

In the season, with her daughter, she goes to town, and drives daily in the park, just the same as today she has driven through the leaf-strewn country lane to the market town. They go also to the sea-side, and now and then to the Continent. They are, of course, invited to the local balls, and to many of the best houses on more

private occasions. The ramifications of finance do not except the proudest descendants of the Crusaders, and 'the firm' has its clients even among them. Bonnets come down from Madame Louise, boxes of novels from Mudie's; 'Le Follet' is read in the original, and many a Parisian romance as well. Visitors are continually coming and going — the carriage is perpetually backwards and forwards to the distant railway station. Friends come to the shooting, the hunting, the fishing; there is never any lack of society.

The house is full of servants, and need be, to wait upon these people. Now, in former days, and not such a great while since, the best of servants came from the country. Mistresses sought for them, and mourned when, having imbibed town ways and town independence, they took their departure to 'better' themselves. But that is a thing of the past; it is gone with the disappearance of the old style of country life. Servant girls in farm-houses when young used to have a terribly hard life: hard work, hard fare, up early of a morning, stone flags under foot by day, bare boards under foot upstairs, small pay, and hard words too often. But they turned out the best of women, the healthiest and strongest, the most sought after. Now they learn a great deal about Timbuctoo, and will soon, no doubt, about Cyprus; but the 'servant from the country' is no more. Nothing less will suit them to begin with than the service of the parish clergyman, then they aspire to the Grange, get there, and receive a finishing education, and can never afterwards condescend to go where a footman is not kept. They become, in short, fine ladies, whose fathers are still at the plough — ladies who at home have been glad of bread and bacon, and now cannot possibly survive without hot butcher's meat every day, and game and fish in their seasons.

But to return. Mrs — and her daughter have also their saddle horses. They do not often hunt, but frequently go to the meet. They have, it is true, an acceptable excuse for preferring riding to walking — the fashion of tying the dress back so tightly makes it extremely difficult for a lady to get over a country stile. The rigours of winter only enable them to appear even yet more charming in furs and sealskin. In all this the Grange people have not laid themselves open to any reproach as to the extravagance or pretension of their doings. With them it is genuine, real, unaffected: in

brief, they have money, and have a right to what it can purchase.

Mr — is not a tenant farmer from necessity; personally he is not a farmer at all, and knows no more of shorthorns than the veriest 'city' man. He has a certain taste for country life, and this is his way of enjoying it — and a very acute way, too, when you come to analyse it. The major portion of his capital is, with his wife's, in the 'firm'; it is administered and employed for him by men whose family interests and his are identical, whose knowledge of business is profound, whose own capital is there too. It is a fortunate state of things, not brought about in a day, but the growth of more than one generation. Now this man, as has been remarked, has a taste for country life — that is to say, he is an enthusiast over horses — not betting, but horses in their best form. He likes to ride and drive about, to shoot, and fish, and hunt. There is nothing despicable in this, but, after the manner of men, of course he must find an excuse.

He found it in the children when they were young — two boys and one girl. It was better for them to have country air, to ride about the country lanes, and over the hills. The atmosphere altogether was more healthy, more manly than in the suburbs of a city. The excuse is a good one. Now come the means; two plans are open to him. He can buy an estate, or he can rent a large farm, or rather series of farms. If he purchases a fine estate he must withdraw his capital from business. In the first place, that would be inconvenient to old friends, and even unjust to them, in the second place, it would reduce his income most materially. Suppose we say, not for absolute exactness, but for the sake of present contrast, that capital well invested in business brings in ten per cent. The same capital invested in land brings in, say, three per cent nominally; but it is as much in reality if you deduct those expensive improvements which tenants insist nowadays, and the five per cents and ten per cents allowed off the rent in bad years? At all events, it is certain that landlords, as a class, are investing more and more every year in business, which looks as if they did not consider land itself sufficiently remunerative. In addition, when you have bought your estate, should you subsequently wish to realize, the difficulties and delays are very trying. You cannot go down to your broker and say, 'Sell me a thousand acres this morning.' Capital in land is locked up.

Mr — having been trained in traditions of ready money and easy transfer, does not like this prospect. But as the tenant of a great farm it is quite another matter. The larger part of his capital still remains in the 'firm', and earns him a handsome income. That which is invested in stock, cattle, horses, implements, etc., is in a sense readily negotiable if ever he should desire to leave. Instead of having to pet and pamper discontented tenants, his landlord has to pet and pamper him. He has, in fact, got the upper hand. There are plenty of landlords who would be only too glad to get the rich Mr — to manure and deep-plough their lands; but there are comparatively few Mr —'s whose rent-day payments can be implicitly relied on. Mr —, in point of fact, gets all the sweets of the country gentleman's life, and leaves the owner all the sour. He has no heir presumptive to check his proceedings; no law of entail to restrain him; no old settlements to bind him hand and foot; none of those hundred and one family interests to consult which accumulate in the course of years around landed estate, and so seriously curtail the freedom of the man in possession, the head of the family. So far as liberty and financial considerations go, he is much better off than his landlord, who perhaps has a title.

Though he knows nothing of farming, he has the family instinct of accounts and figures; he audits the balance-sheets and books of his bailiff personally, and is not easily cheated. Small peculations of course go on, but nothing serious. The farms pay their way, and contribute a trifle towards the household expenses. For the rest, it is taken out in liberty, out-of-door life, field sports, and unlimited horses. His wife and daughter mix in the best society the county affords, besides their annual visits to town and the sea-side: they probably enjoy thrice the liberty and pleasure they would elsewhere. Certainly they are in blooming health. The eldest son is studying for the law, the younger has the commercial instinct more strongly developed, and is already with the 'firm'. Both of them get the full benefit of country life whenever they wish; both of them feel that there is plenty of capital behind them, and not the slightest jealousy exists on account of primogeniture. Of course they have their troubles — what family has not its troubles? — but on the whole their position is an enviable one.

When Mrs — and her daughter rustle into their pew at church — placed next in honour to that of the proprietor of the soil — all eyes

are turned upon them. The old-fashioned farmer's wife, who until her years pressed heavily upon her made the cheese and butter in her husband's dairy, is not so old but that her eyes can distinguish the colour of a ribbon. She may talk of such things as vanities, and unknown in her day, but for all that a pair of keen eyes criticize skirt, and trimmings, and braidings, and so forth, as displayed up in the Grange pew. Her daughter, who is quite young – for in her mother's time farming people did not marry till late in life – brings a still keener pair of eyes to bear in the same direction.

The bonnets from Regent Street are things to think over and talk of. The old lady disinters her ancient finery; the girl, by hook or crook, is determined to dress in the fashion. If one farmer's wife is a fine lady, why not another? Do not even the servant girls at the Grange come out twenty times finer than people who have a canvas bag full of sovereigns at home, and many such bags at the bank? So that the Grange people, though they pay their way handsomely, and plough deep and manure lavishly, and lead the van of agriculture, are not, perhaps, an unmixed good. They help on that sapping and undermining of the ancient, sturdy simplicity, the solid oak of country character, replacing it with veneer. It is not, of course, all, or a tenth part, their fault, or in any way traceable to them. It is part and parcel of the wide-spread social changes which have gradually been proceeding.

But the tenant farmer's wife who made the butter and cheese, and even helped to salt bacon, where is she now? Where are the healthy daughters that used to assist her? The wife is a fine lady – not, indeed, with carriage and pair, but with a dandy dog-cart at least; not with three-guinea bonnets, but with a costly sealskin jacket. There are kid gloves on her hands; there is a suspicion of perfume about her; there is a rustling of silk and satin, and a waving of ostrich feathers. The daughter is pale and interesting, and interprets Beethoven, and paints the old mill; while a skilled person, hired at a high price, rules in the dairy. The son rides a-hunting, and is glib on the odds. The 'offices' – such it is the fashion to call the places in which work was formerly done – are carefully kept in the background. The violets and snowdrops and crocuses are rooted up, all the sweet and tender old flowers ruthlessly eradicated, to make way for a blazing parterre after the manner of the suburban villa – gay in the summer, in the spring a

wilderness of clay, in the autumn a howling desert of musty evergreens.

The 'civilization' of the town has, in fact, gone out and taken root afresh in the country. There is no reason why the farmer should not be educated; there is no reason why his wife should not wear a sealskin jacket, or the daughter interpret Beethoven. But the question arises, Has not some of the old stubborn spirit of earnest work and careful prudence gone with the advent of the piano and the oil painting? While wearing the dress of a lady, the wife cannot tuck up her sleeves and see to the butter, or even feed the poultry, which are down at the pen across 'a nasty dirty field'. It is easy to say that farming has gone to the dogs, that corn is low, and stock uncertain, and rents high, and so forth. All that is true, but difficulties are nothing new; nor must too much be expected from the land.

A moderate-sized farm, of from 200 to 300 acres, will no more enable the mistress and the misses to play the fine lady today than it would two generations ago. It requires work now the same as then - steady, persevering work - and, what is more important, prudence, economy, parsimony if you like; nor do these necessarily mean the coarse manners of a former age. Manners may be good, education may be good, the intellect and even the artistic sense may be cultivated, and yet extravagance avoided. The proverb is true still: 'You cannot have your hare and cook him too.' Now so many cook their hares in the present day without even waiting to catch them first. A euphuism has been invented to cover the wrongfulness of this system; it is now called 'discounting'. The fine lady farmers discount their husbands' corn and fat cattle, cheese and butter, before they reach the market. By-and-by the plough stops in the furrow, and the team is put up to auction, and farewell is said to the old homestead for ever more.

There was no warmer welcome to be met with in life than used to be bestowed upon the fortunate visitor to an old house in the country where the people were not exactly farmers in the ordinary sense, because they were sufficiently well off to be independent, and yet made no pretence to gentility. You dropped in quite unexpectedly and informally after a pleasant stroll about the fields with a double-barrel, untrammelled by any attendant. The dogs were all over cleavers sticking to their coats, and your boots had

to be wiped with a wisp of straw; your pocket was heavy with a couple of rabbits or a hare, and your hands black enough from powder and handling gates and stiles. But they made you feel immediately that such trifles were not of the slightest account.

The dogs were allowed to rush in anyhow and set to work to lick their paws by the fire as if the house was their own. Your apology about your boots and general state of disorder was received with a smile by the mistress, who said she had sons of her own, and knew their ways. Forthwith one sturdy son seized the double-barrel, and conveyed it to a place of safety; a second took the rabbits or the hare, that you might not be incommoded by such a lump in your pocket, and sent the game on home to your quarters by a labourer; a third relieved you of your hat. As many tall young ladies rose to offer you a seat, so that it was really difficult to know which way to turn, besides which the old grandfather with silvery hair pressed you to take his chair by the fire.

They had just sat down to the old-fashioned tea at half-past four, and in a moment there was a cup and plate ready. The tea had a fragrant scent, warm and grateful after the moist atmosphere of the meadows, smelling of decaying leaves. The mistress suggested that a nip of brandy might improve it, thinking that tea was hardly strong enough for a man. But that was declined; for what could be more delicious than the sweet, thick cream poured in by a liberal hand? A fine ham had already been put on the table, as if by magic – the girls really seemed to anticipate everything you could possibly want. As for the butter, it was exquisite, and so, too, the home-baked bread, the more so because only touched in the processes of preparing by the whitest and softest of hands. Such simple things became luxuries when brought to perfection by loving care. The old dog on the hearthrug came thrusting his nose into your hands, making almost too great friends, being perfectly well aware (cunning old fellow) that he could coax more out of a visitor than one of the family, who knew how he had stuffed all day.

Over all there was an atmosphere of welcome, a genial brightness. The young men were anxious to tell you where the best sport could be got. The young ladies had a merry, genuine, unaffected smile – clearly delighted to see you, and not in the least ashamed of it. They showed an evident desire to please, without a trace of an *arrière-pensée*. Tall, well developed, in the height of good health,

the bloom upon the cheek and the brilliant eyes formed a picture irresistibly charming. But it was the merry laugh that so long dwelt in the memory — nothing so thoroughly enchants one as the woman who laughs from her heart in the joyousness of youth. They joined freely in the conversation, but did not thrust themselves forward. They were, of course, eager for news of the far away world, but not a hint was breathed of those social scandals which now form our favourite gossip. From little side remarks concerning domestic matters it was evident that they were well acquainted with household duties. Indeed, they assisted to remove the things from the table without any consciousness that it was a menial task.

It was not long after tea before, drawing round the fire, pipes were produced, and you were asked to smoke. Of course you declined on account of the ladies, but it was none the less pleasant to be asked. There was the great secret of it all — the genuine, liberal, open-handed and open-hearted proffering of all the house contained to the guest. And it was none the less amusing conversation because each of the girls candidly avowed her own opinions upon such topics as were started — blushing a little, it is true, if you asked the reason for the opinion, for ladies are not always quite ready with the why and wherefore. But the contrast of character, the individuality displayed, gave a zest and interest to the talk; so that the hour wore late before you were aware of it. Then, if you would go, two, at least, of the three boys piloted you by the best and cleanest route, and did not wish you farewell till you were in the straight road. This was not so many years ago.

Today, if you call at such a country house, how strangely different is the reception! None of the family come to the door to meet you. A servant shows you into a parlour — drawing-room is the proper word now — well carpeted and furnished in the modern style. She then takes your name — what a world of change is shown in that trifling piece of etiquette! By-and-by, after the proper interval, the ladies enter in morning costume, not a stray curl allowed to wander from its stern bands, nature rigidly repressed, decorum — ‘Society’ — in every flounce and trimming. You feel that you have committed a solecism coming on foot, and so carrying the soil on your boots from the fields without into so elegant an apartment. Visitors are obviously expected to arrive on wheels, and in correct trim for company. A remark about the crops falls

on barren ground; a question concerning the dairy, ignorantly hazarded, is received with so much *hauteur* that at last you see such subjects are considered vulgar. Then a touch of the bell, and decanters of port and sherry are produced, and your wine presented to you on an electro salver, together with sweet biscuits. It is the correct thing to sip one glass and eat one biscuit.

The conversation is so insipid, so entirely confined to the merest platitudes, that it becomes absolutely a relief to escape. You are not pressed to stay and dine, as you would have been in the old days – not because there is a lack of hospitality, but because they would prefer a little time for preparation in order that the dinner might be got up in polite style. So you depart – chilled and depressed. No one steps with you to open the gate and exchange a second farewell, and express a cordial wish to see you again there. You feel that you must walk in measured step and place your hat precisely perpendicular, for the eyes of ‘Society’ are upon you. What a comfort when you turn a corner behind the hedge and can thrust your hands into your pockets and whistle!

The young ladies, however, still possess one thing which they cannot yet destroy – the good constitution and the rosy look derived from ancestors whose days were spent in the field under the glorious sunshine and the dews of heaven. They worry themselves about it in secret and wish they could appear more ladylike – i.e. thin and white. Nor can they feel quite so languid and indifferent, and *blasé* as they desire. Thank Heaven they cannot! But they have succeeded in obliterating the faintest trace of character, and in suppressing the slightest approach to animation. They have all got just the same opinions on the same topics – that is to say, they have none at all; the idea of a laugh has departed. There is a dead line of uniformity. But if you are sufficiently intimate to enter into the inner life of the place it will soon be apparent that they either are or wish to appear up to the ‘ways of the world’.

They read the so-called social journals, and absorb the gossip, tittle-tattle, and personalities – absorb it because they have no means of comparison or of checking the impression it produces of the general loose tone of society. They know all about it, much more than you do. No turn of the latest divorce case or great social exposure has escaped them, and the light, careless way in which

it is the fashion nowadays to talk openly of such things, as if they were got up like a novel – only with living characters – for amusement, has penetrated into this distant circle. But then they have been to half the leading watering-places – from Brighton to Scarborough; as for London, it is an open book to them; the railways have long dissipated the pleasing mysteries that once hung over the metropolis. Talk of this sort is, of course, only talk; still it is not a satisfactory sign of the times. If the country girl is no longer the hoyden that swung on the gates and romped in the hay, neither has she the innocent thought of the olden days.

At the same time our friends are greatly devoted to the Church – old people used to attend on Sundays as a sacred and time-honoured duty, but the girls leave them far behind, for they drive up in a pony carriage to the distant church at least twice a week besides. They talk of matins and evensong; they are full of vestments, and have seen ‘such lovely things’ in that line. At Christmas and Easter they are mainly instrumental in decorating the interior till it becomes perfectly gaudy with colour, and the old folk mutter and shake their heads. Their devotion in getting hothouse flowers is quite touching. One is naturally inclined to look with a liberal eye upon what is capable of a good construction. But is all this quite spontaneous? Has the new curate nothing at all to do with it? Is it not considered rather the correct thing to be ‘High’ in views, and even to manifest an Ultramontane tendency? There is a rather too evident determination to go to the extreme – the girls are clearly bent upon thrusting themselves to the very front of the parish, so that no one shall be talked of but the Misses —. Anything is seized upon that will afford an opening for posing before the world of the parish, whether it be an extreme fashion in dress or in ritual.

And the parish is splitting up into social cliques. These girls, the local leaders of fashion, hold their heads far above those farmers’ sons who bear a hand in the field. No one is eligible who takes a share in manual work: not even to be invited to the house, or even to be acknowledged if met in the road. The Misses —, whose papa is well-to-do, and simply rides round on horseback to speak to the men with his steam-plough, could not possibly demean themselves to acknowledge the existence of the young men who actually handle a fork in the haymaking time. Nothing

less than a curate is worthy of their smile. A very great change has come over country society in this way. Of course, men (and women) with money were always more eligible than those without; but it is not so very long ago that one and all – well-to-do and poor – had one bond in common. Whether they farmed large or small acres, all worked personally. There was no disgrace in the touch of the plough – rather the contrary; now it is contamination itself.

The consequence is that the former general goodwill and acquaintanceship is no more. There are no friendly meetings; there is a distinct social barrier between the man and the woman who labours and the one who does not. These fashionable young ladies could not possibly even go into the hayfield because the sun would spoil their complexion, they refresh themselves with aerated waters instead. They could not possibly enter the dairy because it smells so nasty. They would not know their father's teams if they met them on the road. As for speaking to the workpeople – the idea would be too absurd!

Once on a time a lift in the waggon just across the wet turf to the macadamized road – if it chanced to be going that way – would have been looked upon as a fortunate thing. The Misses — would indeed stare if one of their papa's carters touched his hat and suggested that they should get up. They have a pony carriage and groom of their own. He drives the milk-cart to the railway station in the morning; in the afternoon he dons the correct suit and drives the Misses — into the town to shopping. Now there exists a bitter jealousy between the daughters of the tradesmen in the said town and these young ladies. There is a race between them as to who shall be first in fashion and social rank. The Misses — know very well that it galls their rivals to see them driving about so grandly half the afternoon up and down the streets, and to see the big local people lift their hats, as the banker, with whom, of course, the large farmer has intimate dealings. All this is very little; on paper it reads mean and contemptible; but in life it is real – in life these littlenesses play a great part. The Misses — know nothing of those long treasured recipes formerly handed down in old country houses, and never enter the kitchen. No doubt, if the fashion for teaching cooking presently penetrates into the parish, they will take a leading part, and with much show and blowing of trumpets instruct the cottager how to boil the pot.

Anything, in short, that happens to be the rage will attract them, but there is little that is genuine about them, except the eagerness for a new excitement.

What manner of men shall accept these ladies as their future helpmates? The tenant farmers are few and far between that could support their expenditure upon dress, the servants they would require, and last, but not least, the waste which always accompanies ignorance in household management. Nor, indeed, do they look for tenant farmers, but hope for something higher in the scale.

The Misses — are fortunate in possessing a 'papa' sufficiently well-to-do to enable them to live in this manner. But there are hundreds of young ladies whose fathers have not got so much capital in their farms, while what they have is perhaps borrowed. Of course these girls help cheerfully in the household, in the dairy, and so forth? No. Some are forced by necessity to assist in the household with unwilling hands; but few, indeed, enter the dairy. All dislike the idea of manual labour, though never so slight. Therefore they acquire a smattering of knowledge, and go out as governesses. They earn but a small stipend in that profession, because they have rarely gone through a sufficiently strict course of study themselves. But they would rather live with strangers, accepting a position which is often invidious, than lift a hand to work at home, so great is the repugnance to manual labour. These, again, have no domestic knowledge (beyond that of teaching children), none of cooking, or general household management. If they marry a tenant farmer of their own class, with but small capital, they are too often a burden financially. Whence comes this intense dislike to hand work — this preference for the worst paid head work? It is not confined, of course, to the gentler sex. No more striking feature of modern country life can be found.

You cannot blame these girls, whether poor or moderately well-to-do, for thinking of something higher, more refined, and elevating than the cheese-tub or the kitchen. It is natural, and it is right, that they should wish to rise above that old, dull, dead level in which their mothers and grandmothers worked from youth to age. The world has gone on since then — it is a world of education, books, and wider sympathies. In all this they must and ought to share. The problem is how to enjoy the intellectual progress of the century and yet not forfeit the advantages of the hand labour and

the thrift of our ancestors? How shall we sit up late at night, burning the midnight oil of study, and yet rise with the dawn, strong from sweet sleep, to guide the plough? One good thing must be scored down to the credit of the country girls of the day. They have done much to educate the men. They have shamed them out of the old, rough, boorish ways; compelled them to abandon the former coarseness, to become more gentlemanly in manner. By their interest in the greater world of society, literature, art, and music (more musical publications probably are now sold for the country in a month than used to be in a year), they have made the somewhat narrow-sighted farmer glance outside his parish. If the rising generation of tenant farmers have lost much of the bigoted provincial mode of thought, together with the provincial pronunciation, it is undoubtedly due to the influence of the higher ideal of womanhood that now occupies their minds. And this is a good work to have accomplished.

CHAPTER X

Mademoiselle, the Governess

A COUNTRY 'roadside' railway station seemed deserted upon a warm August afternoon. It was all but concealed on that level ground by the hedges and trees of the fields with which it was surrounded. There was no sound of man or wheels, and nothing moving upon the platform. On the low green banks of the rail, where the mast-like telegraph poles stood, the broad leaves of the coltsfoot almost covered the earth, and were dusty with the sand whirled up an hour since behind the rushing express. By the footpath, higher up under the close-cropped hedge, the yarrow flourished, lifting its white flower beside the trodden soil. The heavy boots of the platelayers walking to and fro to their work on the permanent way brushed against it, and crushed the venturous fibres of the creeping cinquefoil that stretched into the path. From the yellow standing wheat the sparrows rose in a bevy, and settled upon the hedge, chirping merrily. Farther away, where a meadow had been lately mown, the swallows glided to and fro, but just above the short grass, round and round, under the shadow of the solitary oaks. Over the green aftermath is the swallows' favourite haunt when the day, though passing fair, does not look like settled weather. For lack of such weather the reapers have not yet entered the ripening corn.

But, for the hour, the sun shines brightly, and a narrow line along the upper surfaces of the metals, burnished by the polishing friction of a thousand wheels, glints like silver under the rays. The red brick of the booking office looks redder and more staring under the fierce light. The door is locked, and there is no waiting-room in which to take shelter; nothing but a projecting roof over a part of the platform. On the lintel is the station-master's name painted in small white letters, like the name of the landlord over the doorway of an inn. Two corded boxes lie on the platform, and

near them stand half a dozen rusty milk tins, empty. With the exception of a tortoiseshell cat basking in the sunshine, there seems nothing living in the station, and the long endless rails stretching on either side in a straight line are vacant. For hours during the day the place slumbers, and a passenger gliding by in the express may well wonder why a station was built at all in the mist of trees and hedges without so much as a single visible house.

But by night and very early in the morning there is bustle enough. Then the white painted cattle-pen yonder, from which the animals are forced into the cattle trucks, is full of frightened beasts, lowing doubtfully, and only goaded in by the resounding blows upon their backs. Then the sheep file in in more patient ranks, but also doubtful and bleating as they go. An engine snorts to and fro, shunting coal waggons on to the siding – coal for the traction engines, and to be consumed in threshing out the golden harvest around. Signalmen, with red and green lights, rush hither and thither, the bull's-eyes now concealed by the trucks, and now flashing out brightly like strange will-o'-the-wisps. At intervals long and heavy goods trains go by, causing the solid earth to tremble.

Presently the sun rises over the distant hills, and the red arms of the signals stand out clearly defined, and then the noise of wheels, the shouts of the drivers, and the quick sound of hoofs betoken the approach of the milk carts with their freight for the early morning train. From the platform it is out of sight; but a few yards from the gate a small inn is hidden under the tall elms of the hedgerow. It has sprung up since the railway came, and is called the Railway Hotel. It proffers good stabling, and even a fly and posting for the passenger who finds himself set down in that lonely place – a mere road – without the certainty of a friendly carriage meeting him. The porter may, perhaps, be taking his glass within. The inspector, or stationmaster (whichever may be technically correct), now that the afternoon express has gone safely through, has strolled up the line to his garden to see how his potatoes are getting on. He knows full well that the slow, stopping train dispatched just after it will not reach his station for at least an hour.

Outside the 'Hotel' stands a pony cart – a gaily coloured travelling-rug lies across the seat, and the pony, a perfect little beauty, is cropping the grass by the hedge side. By and by a countryman

comes up the 'road, evidently a labourer dressed in his best – he hastens to the 'Hotel' instead of to the station, and finds from the porter that he is at least twenty minutes too soon. Then a waggon arrives, and stops while the carter drinks. Presently the porter and the labourer stroll over to the platform, and after them a young fellow – a farmer's son, not yet a man but more than a boy – comes out and rearranges the travelling-rug in the pony cart. He then walks on to the platform, whistling defiantly with his hands in his pockets, as if he had got an unpleasant duty to perform, but was not going to be intimidated. He watches the stationmaster unlock the booking-office, and follows him in out of idle curiosity.

It is booking-office, parcel-office, waiting-room and all combined, and the telegraph instrument is there, too, some of the needles blocked over with a scrap of paper. The place is crammed with sacks, bags, boxes, parcels, and goods mixed together, such as ironwork for agricultural machines, and in a corner lies a rickcloth smelling strongly of tar like the rigging of a ship. On the counter, for there is no sliding window as usual at large stations, stands the ticket-stamping machine, surrounded with piles of forms, invoices, notices, letters, and the endless documents inseparable from railway business, all printed on a peculiar paper with a faint shade of yellow.

Somebody says 'A' be coming,' and the young farmer walks out to watch the white steam now just visible far away over the trees. The train runs round the curve on to the straight, and the engine in front grows gradually larger and larger as it comes nearer, visibly vibrating till the brake draws it up at the platform.

Master Jack has no difficulty in identifying the passenger he has come to meet. His sister, a governess, coming home for a holiday, is the only person that alights, and the labourer, dressed for the occasion, is the only one who gets in. No sooner is he in than he gapes out of the window open-mouthed at Miss S—. She wears a light Ulster to protect her dress from the dust and dirt of travel. Her fashionable hat has an air of the West End; her gloved hand holds a dainty little bag; she steps as those must do who wear tight dresses and high heels to their boots. Up goes her parasol instantly to shade her delicate complexion from the glaring sun. Master Jack does not even take her hand, or kiss her; he looks her up and down with a kind of contemptuous admiration, nods, and

asks how much luggage? He has, you see, been repulsed for 'gush' on previous occasions. Mademoiselle points to her luggage, which the porter, indeed, has already taken out. He worked in his boyhood on her father's farm, and attends upon her with cheerful alacrity. She gives him a small coin, but looks the other way, without a sign of recognition. The luggage is placed in the pony cart.

Mademoiselle gets in without so much as patting the beautiful little creature in the shafts. Her ticket is the only first-class ticket that has been given up at that lonely station all the week. 'Do make haste,' she remarks petulantly as her brother pauses to speak to a passing man who looks like a dealer. Master Jack turns the pony cart, and away they go rattling down the road. The porter, whilom an agricultural labourer, looks after them with a long and steady stare. It is not the first time he has seen this, but he can hardly take it in yet.

'She do come the lady grandish, don't her?' the dealer remarks meditatively. 'Now don't her father —'.

'Ay,' interrupts the porter, 'he be one of the old sort; but she —' he cannot get any further for lack of an appropriate illustration. The arrival of mademoiselle periodically takes their breath away at that little place.

As the pair rattle along in the pony trap there is for a time a total silence. Mademoiselle looks neither to the right nor the left, and asks after nobody. She does not note the subtle tint of bronze that has begun to steal over the wheat, nor the dark discoloured hay, witness of rough weather, still lying in the meadows. Her face — it is a very pretty face — does not light up with any enthusiasm as well-remembered spots come into sight. A horseman rides round a bend of the road, and meets them — he stares hard at her — she takes no heed. It is a young farmer, an old acquaintance, anxious for some sign of recognition. After he has passed he lifts his hat, like a true countryman, unready at the moment. As for the brother, his features express gathering and almost irrepressible disgust. He kicks with his heavy boots, he whistles, and once now and then gives a species of yell. Mademoiselle turns up her pretty nose, and readjusts her chevron gloves.

'Have you not got any cuffs, Jack?' she asks, 'your wrists look so bare without them.'

Jack makes no reply. Another silence. Presently he points with an expression meant to be sardonic at a distant farm-house with his whip.

'Jenny's married,' he says, full well aware that this announcement will wake her up, for there had been of old a sort of semi-feud or rivalry between the two girls, daughters of neighbouring farmers, and both with pretensions to good looks.

'Who to?' she asks eagerly.

'To old Billy L—; lots of tin.'

'Pshaw!' replies mademoiselle. 'Why, he's sixty, a nasty, dirty, old wretch.'

'He has plenty of money,' suggests Jack.

'What you think plenty of money, perhaps. He is nothing but a farmer,' as if a farmer was quite beneath her notice.

Just then a farmer rode out into the road from the gateway of a field, and Jack pulled up the pony. The farmer was stout, elderly, and florid; he appeared fairly well-to-do by his dress, but was none too particular to use his razor regularly. Yet there was a tenderness – almost a pathos – in the simple words he used: 'Georgie, dear, come home?' 'Yes, papa,' and she kissed his scrubby chin as he bent down from his horse. He would not go to the station to meet her; but he had been waiting about behind the hedge for an hour to see her come along. He rode beside the pony cart, but Georgie did not say anything more, or ask after anyone else.

As they turned a corner the farmer pointed ahead. 'There's your mother, Georgie, looking over the garden wall.' The yearning mother had been there these two hours, knowing that her darling could not arrive before a certain time, and yet unable in her impatience to stay within. Those old eyes were dim with tears under the spectacles as Georgie quietly kissed her forehead, and then suddenly, with something like generous feeling, her lips.

They went in, an old pointer, whose days in the stubble were nearly over, following close at Georgie's heels, but without obtaining a pat for his loving memory. The table was spread for tea – a snowy cloth, the whitest of bread, the most delicious golden butter, the ham fresh cooked, as Georgie might be hungry, the thick cream, the silver teapot, polished for Georgie, and the bright flowers in the vase before her plate. The window was open, with its view of the old, old hills, and a breath of summer air came in

from the meadow. The girl glanced round, frowned, and went upstairs to her room without a word, passing on the landing the ancient clock in its tall case, ticking loud and slow.

And this was 'home'. The whole place jarred upon her, fresh as she was from a fine house in Belgravia. The sitting-room beneath, which she had so quickly left, looked cheerful and homely, but it was that very homeliness that jarred upon her. The teapot was real silver, but it was of old-fashioned shape. Solid as the furniture was, and still after so many years of service worth money, yet it was chipped by kicks from iron-shod boots, which had also worn the dingy carpet bare. There was an absence of the knick-knacks that strew the rooms of people in 'Society'. There was not even a bell-handle to pull; if you wanted the maid of all work, you must open the door and call to her. These little things, trifles as they may be, repelled her. It was a bitter cup to her to come 'home'.

Mr S— was a farmer of fair means, and, compared with many of his neighbours, well-to-do, and well connected. But he was still a yeoman only, and personally made pretensions to nothing more. Though he himself had received little or no education, he quite saw the value of it, and was determined that his children should be abreast of the times. Accordingly, so soon as Georgie grew old enough, a governess with high recommendations, and who asked what the farmer then thought a high price (he knows more about such things now!) was had down from London. Of course the rudimentary ABC of learning could just as well have been imparted by an ordinary person, but Mr and Mrs S— had a feeling which they could not perhaps have expressed in words, that it was not so much the actual reading and writing, and French and music, and so on, as a social influence that was needed to gradually train the little country girl into a young lady fit to move in higher society.

The governess did her work thoroughly. Georgie was not allowed to walk in the wet grass, to climb up the ladder on to the half-completed hayrick, and romp under the rickcloth, to paddle with naked feet in the shallow brook, or any other of the things that country children have done from time immemorial. Such things she was taught were not ladylike, and, above all, she was kept away from the cottage people. She was not permitted to enter their doors, to converse with the women, or to watch the carter

with his horses. Such vulgar folk and their vulgar dialect were to be carefully avoided. Nor must she get into a hedge after a bird's nest, lest she should tear her frock.

It was not long before the governess really ruled the house. The farmer felt himself totally unable to interfere in these matters; they were outside his experience altogether. His wife did not like it, but for Georgie's sake she gave up her former habits, and endeavoured to order the house according to the ideas of the governess from London. The traditions, as it were, of the place were upset. It was not a solitary instance, the same thing has happened in scores of farm-houses to a more or less degree. Mr S— all his life had ridden on horseback, or driven a gig, which did very well for him and his wife. But the governess thought Georgie ought to learn, to ride and drive, and gigs were so much out of fashion. So the pony cart and pony were purchased for her, and in this she went into the distant market town twice or more weekly. Sometimes it was for shopping, sometimes to fetch household goods, sometimes to see friends; any excuse answered very well. The governess said, and really believed, that it was better for Georgie to be away from the farm as much as possible, to see town people (if only a country town), and to learn their ways.

The many cheap illustrated papers giving the last details of fashionable costumes were, of course, brought home to be carefully read in the evenings. These publications have a large circulation now in farm-houses. Naturally Georgie soon began to talk about, and take an interest — as girls will do — in the young gentlemen of the town, and who was, and who was not eligible. As for the loud-voiced young farmers, with their slouching walk, their ill-fitting clothes, and stupid talk about cows and wheat, they were intolerable. A banker's clerk at least — nothing could be thought of under a clerk in the local banks; of course, his salary was not high, but then his 'position'. The retail grocers and bakers and such people were quite beneath one's notice — low, common persons. The 'professional tradesmen' (whatever that may be) were decidedly better, and could be tolerated. The solicitors, bank managers, one or two brewers (wholesale — nothing retail), large corn factors or coal merchants, who kept a carriage of some kind — these formed the select society next under, and, as it were, surrounding the clergy and gentry. Georgie at twelve years old looked

at least as high as one of these; a farm-house was to be avoided above all things.

As she grew older her mind was full of the local assembly ball. The ball had been held for forty years or more, and had all that time been in the hands of the exclusive upper circles of the market town. They only asked their own families, relations (not the poor ones), and visitors. When Georgie was invited to this ball it was indeed a triumph. Her poor mother cried with pleasure over her ball dress. Poor woman, she was a good, a too good, mother, but she had never been to a ball. There were, of course, parties, picnics, and so on, to which Georgie, having entered the charmed circle, was now asked; and thus her mind from the beginning centred in the town. The sheep-fold, the cattle-pen, the cheese-tub, these were thrust aside. They did not interest her, she barely understood the meaning when her father took the first prize at an important cattle show. What So-and-so would wear at the flower show, where all the select would come, much more nearly concerned her.

At the high-class academy where her education was finished the same process went on. The other girls quickly made her thoroughly understand (a bitter knowledge) that the great people in the little market town, the very richest of them, were but poor in comparison with their papas. Their papas were in the 'City', or on 'Change', and had as many thousands a year as the largest farmer she knew could reckon hundreds. Georgie felt ashamed of her papa, recollecting his crumpled old hat, and his scrubby chin. being really a nice girl, under the veneer that was so industriously placed upon her, she made friends among her fellow scholars, and was invited to more than one of their grand homes in Kensington and the suburbs of London. There she learned all the pomp of villa life, which put into the shade the small incomes which displayed their miserable vanities in the petty market town. Footmen, butlers, late dinners, wines, carriages, the ceaseless gossip of 'Society' were enough to dazzle the eyes of a girl born so near the cowshed. The dresses she had to wear to mix with these grand friends cost a great deal – her parents sacrificing their own comforts for her advantage – and yet, in comparison with the beautiful costumes she saw, they seemed shabby.

Georgie was so far fortunate as to make friends of some of the

elder people, and when she had passed her examinations, and obtained the diplomas and certificates which are now all essential, through their interest she obtained at starting a very high salary. It was not long before she received as much as sixty or seventy pounds a year. It was not only that she really was a clever and accomplished girl, but her recommendations were influential. She was employed by wealthy people, who really did not care what they paid so long as their children were in good hands. Now to the old folk at home, and to the neighbours, this seemed an immense salary for a girl, especially when the carriage, the footmen, the wines, and late dinners, and so on, were taken into consideration. The money, however, was of very little use to her. She found it necessary to dress equal to her place. She had to have several dresses to wear, according to the time of day, and she had to have new ones very often, or she might be told petulantly and pointedly by her mistress that 'one gets so weary of seeing the same dresses every day'. Instead of the high salary leaving a handsome profit, her father had occasionally to pay a stiff bill for her. But then the 'position' – look at the 'position' and the society.

Georgie, in process of time, went to Scotland, to Paris, the South of France, to Rome, and Naples. Being a discreet girl, and having a winning manner, she became as much a companion to her mistress as governess, and thus saw and heard more of the world than she would otherwise have done. She saw some very grand people indeed occasionally. After this, after the Continent, and, above all, London in the season, the annual visit to the old farm-house came to be a bitter time of trial. Georgie had come home now for a few days only, to ask for money, and already before she had scarcely spoken had rushed upstairs to hide her feeling of revulsion in the privacy of her room.

Her welcome had been warm, and she knew that under the rude exterior it was more than warm; but the absence of refinement jarred upon her. It all seemed so uncouth. She shrank from the homely rooms; the very voice of her mother, trembling with emotion, shocked her ear, unaccustomed to country pronunciation. She missed the soft accents of the drawing-room. From her window she could see nothing but the peaceful fields – the hateful green trees and hedges, the wheat, and the hateful old hills. How miserable it was not to be born to Grosvenor Square!

Georgie's case was, of course, exceptional in so far as her 'success' was concerned. She possessed good natural parts, discretion, and had the advantage of high-class recommendations. But apart from her 'success', her case was not exceptional. The same thing is going on in hundreds of farm-houses. The daughters from the earliest age are brought up under a system of education the practical tendency of which is to train their minds out of the associations of farming. When later on they go out to teach they are themselves taught by the social surroundings of the households into which they enter to still more dislike the old-fashioned ways of agriculture. Take twenty farmers' families, where there are girls, and out of that twenty, fifteen will be found to be preparing for a scholastic life. The farmer's daughter does not like the shop-counter, and, as she cannot stay at home, there is nothing left to her but the profession of governess. Once thoroughly imbued with these 'social' ideas, and a return to the farm is almost impossible. The result is a continuous drain of women out of agriculture – of the very women best fitted in the beginning to be the helpmate of the farmer. In no other calling is the assistance of the wife so valuable; it is not too much to say that part at least of the decadence of agriculture is owing to the lack of women willing to devote themselves as their mothers did before them. It follows that by degrees the farming caste is dying out. The sons go to the city, the daughters go to the city; in a generation, or little more, a once well-known farming family becomes extinct so far as agriculture is concerned.

How could such a girl as poor Georgie, looking out of window at the hateful fields, and all at discord with the peaceful scene, settle down as the mistress of a lonely farm-house?

CHAPTER XI

Fleeceborough—A 'Despot'

AN agricultural district, like a little kingdom, has its own capital city. The district itself is as well defined as if a frontier line had been marked out around it, with sentinels and barriers across the roads, and special tolls and duties. Yet an ordinary traveller, upon approaching, fails to perceive the difference, and may, perhaps, drive right through the territory without knowing it. The fields roll on and rise into the hills, the hills sink again into a plain, just the same as elsewhere; there are cornfields and meadows; villages and farmsteads, and no visible boundary. Nor is it recognized upon the map. It does not fit into any political or legal limit; it is neither a county, half a county, a hundred, or police division. But to the farmer it is a distinct land. If he comes from a distance he will at once notice little peculiarities in the fields, the crops, the stock, or customs, and will immediately inquire if it be not such and such a place that he has heard of. If he resides within thirty miles or so he will ever since boyhood have heard 'the uplands' talked of as if it were a separate country, as distinct as France. Cattle from the uplands, sheep, horses, labourers, corn or hay, or anything and anybody from thence, he has grown up accustomed to regard almost as foreign.

There is good reason, from an agricultural point of view, for this. The district, with its capital city, Fleeceborough, really is distinct, well marked, and defined. The very soil and substrata are characteristic. The products are wheat, and cattle, and sheep, the same as elsewhere, but the proportions of each, the kind of sheep, the traditionary methods and farm customs are separate and marked. The rotation of crops is different, the agreements are on a different basis, the very gates to the fields have peculiar fastenings, not used in other places. Instead of hedges, the fields, perhaps, are often divided by dry stone walls, on which, when they have become

old, curious plants may sometimes be found. For the flora, too, is distinct; you may find herbs here that do not exist a little way off, and on the other hand, search how you will, you will not discover one single specimen of a single flower which strews the meadows elsewhere.

Here the very farm-houses are built upon a different plan, and with different materials; the barns are covered with old stone slates, instead of tiles or thatch. The people are a nation amongst themselves. Their accent is peculiar and easily recognized, and they have their own folklore, their own household habits, particular dainties, and way of life. The tenant farmers, the millers, the inn-keepers, and every Hodge within 'the uplands' (not by any means all hills) – in short, everyone is a citizen of Fleeceborough. Hodge may tend his flock on distant pastures, may fodder his cattle in far-away meadows, and dwell in little hamlets hardly heard of, but all the same he is a Fleeceborough man. It is his centre; thither he looks for everything.

The place is a little market town, the total of whose population in the census records sounds absurdly small; yet it is a complete world in itself; a capital city, with its kingdom and its ruler, for the territory is practically the property of a single family. Enter Fleeceborough by whichever route you will, the first object that fixes the attention is an immensely high and endless wall. If you come by carriage one way, you skirt it for a long distance; if you come the other, you see it as you pass through the narrow streets every now and then at the end of them, closing the prospect and overtopping the lesser houses. By railway it is conspicuous from the windows; and if you walk about the place, you continually come upon it. It towers up perpendicular and inaccessible, like the curtain wall of an old fortification: here and there the upper branches of some great cedar or tall pine just show above it. One or more streets for a space run continuous with it – the wall on one side, the low cottage-houses on the other, and their chimneys are below the coping. It does not really encircle the town, yet it seems everywhere, and is the great fact of the place.

If you wander about examining this wall, and wondering where it begins and where it ends, and what is inside, you may perchance come upon a gateway of noble proportions. It is open, but one hesitates to pass through, despite the pleasant vista of trees and

green sward beyond. There is a watchman's wooden hut, and the aged sentinel is reading his newspaper in the shadow, his breast decorated with medal and clasp, that tell of honourable service. A scarlet-coated soldier may, too, be strolling thereabout, and the castellated top of a barrack-like building near at hand is suggestive of military force. You hesitate, but the warden invites you to walk at your leisure under the old trees, and along the endless glades. If you enter, you pass under the metal scrollwork of the iron gates, and, above, the gilded circle of a coronet glistens in the sunshine. These are the private demesnes of a prince and ruler of Hodge — the very highest and most powerful of his masters in that part of the country. The vast wall encloses his pleasure-grounds and mansion; the broad iron gates give access to mile after mile of park and wood, and the decorated warden or pensioner has but to open them for the free entry of all Fleeceborough and her citizens. Of course the position of the barrack is a mere accident, yet it gives an air of power and authority — the place is really as open, the beautiful park as common and accessible as the hill-top under the sky. A peer only at Westminster, here he is a prince, whose dominions are almost co-extensive with the horizon; and this, the capital city, is for the most part his.

Far away stretches that little kingdom, with its minor towns of villages, hamlets, and farms. Broad green meadows, where the cattle graze beside the streams and in the plains; rolling uplands, ploughed and sown, where the barley flourishes; deep rich wheatlands; high hills and shadowy woods; grey church towers; new glaring schools; quiet wayside inns, and ancient farm-houses tenanted for generations by the same families.

Farmers have long since discovered that it is best to rent under a very large owner, whether personal as in this case, or impersonal as a college or corporation. A very large owner like this can be, and is, more liberal. He puts up sheds, and he drains, and improves, and builds good cottages for the labourers. Provided, of course, that no serious malpractice comes to light, he, as represented by his steward, never interferes, and the tenant is personally free. No one watches his goings out and comings in; he has no sense of an eye for ever looking over the park wall. There is a total absence of the grasping spirit sometimes shown. The farmer does not feel that he will be worried to his last shilling. In case of unfavourable

seasons the landlord makes no difficulty in returning a portion of the rent; he anticipates such an application. Such immense possessions can support losses which would press most heavily upon comparatively small properties. At one side of the estate the soil perchance is light and porous, and is all the better for rain; on the other, half across the county, or quite, the soil is deep and heavy and naturally well watered and flourishes in dry summers. So that there is generally someone prospering if another suffers, and thus a balance is maintained.

A reserve of wealth has, too, slowly accumulated in the family coffers, which, in exceptional years, tides the owner over with little or no appreciable inconvenience. With an income like this, special allowances, even generous allowances, can be and are made, and so the tenants cease to feel that their landlord is living out of their labour. The agreements are just; there is no rapacity. Very likely the original lease or arrangement has expired half a century since; but no one troubles to renew it. It is well understood that no change will be effected. The tenure is as steady as if the tenant had an Act of Parliament at his back.

When men have once settled, they and their descendants remain, generation after generation. By degrees their sons and sons' descendants settle too, and the same name occurs perhaps in a dozen adjacent places. It is this fixed unchangeable character of the district which has enabled the mass of the tenants not indeed to become wealthy, but to acquire a solid, substantial standing. In farming affairs money can be got together only in the slow passage of years; experience has proved that beyond a doubt. These people have been stationary for a length of time, and the moss of the proverb has grown around them. They walk sturdily, and look all men in the face; their fathers put money in the purse. Times are hard here as everywhere, but if they cannot, for the present season, put more in that purse, its contents are not, at all events, much diminished, and enable them to maintain the same straightforward manliness and independence. By and by, they know there will come the chink of the coin again.

When the tenant is stationary, the labourer is also. He stays in the same cottage on the same farm all his life, his descendants remain and work for the same tenant family. He can trace his descent in the locality for a hundred years. From time immemorial

both Hodge and his immediate employers have looked towards Fleeceborough as their capital. Hodge goes in to the market in charge of his master's sheep, his wife trudges in for household necessities. All the hamlet goes in to the annual fairs. Every cottager in the hamlet knows somebody in the town; the girls go there to service, the boys to get employment. The little village shops obtain their goods from thence. All the produce - wheat, barley, oats, hay, cattle, and sheep - is sent into the capital to the various markets held there. The very ideas held in the villages by the inhabitants come from Fleeceborough; the local papers published there are sold all round, and supply them with news, arguments, and the politics of the little kingdom. The farmers look to Fleeceborough just as much or more. It is a religious duty to be seen there on market days. Not a man misses being there; if he is not visible, his circle note it, and guess at various explanations.

Each man has his own particular hostelry, where his father, and his grandfather, put up before him, and where he is expected to dine in the same old room, with the pictures of famous rams, that have fetched fabulous prices, framed against the walls, and ram's horns of exceptional size and peculiar curve fixed up above the mantelpiece. Men come in in groups of two or three, as dinner time approaches, and chat about sheep and wool, and wool and sheep; but no one finally settles himself at the table till the chairman arrives. He is a stout, substantial farmer, who has dined there every market day for the last thirty or forty years.

Everybody has his own particular seat, which he is certain to find kept for him. The dinner itself is simple enough, the waiters perhaps still more simple, but the quality of the viands is beyond praise. The mutton is juicy and delicious, as it should be where the sheep is the very idol of all men's thoughts; the beef is short and tender of grain; the vegetables, nothing can equal them, and they are all here, asparagus and all, in profusion. The landlord grows his own vegetables - every householder in Fleeceborough has an ample garden - and produces the fruit from his own orchards for the tarts. Ever and anon a waiter walks round with a can of ale and fills the glasses, whether asked or not. Beef and mutton, vegetables, and fruit tarts, and ale are simple and plain fare, but when they are served in the best form, how will you surpass them? The real English cheese, the fresh salads, the exquisite butter - everything

on the table is genuine, juicy, succulent, and rich. Could such a dinner be found in London, how the folk would crowd thither! Finally, comes the waiter with his two clean plates, the upper one to receive the money, the lower to retain what is his. If you are a stranger, and remember what you have been charged elsewhere in smoky cities for tough beef, stringy mutton, waxy potatoes, and the very bread black with smuts, you select half a sovereign and drop it on the upper plate. In the twinkling of an eye eight shillings are returned to you; the charge is a florin only.

They live well in Fleeceborough, as every fresh experience of the place will prove; they have plentiful food, and of the best quality; poultry abounds, for every resident having a great garden (many, too, have paddocks) keeps fowls; fresh eggs are common; as for vegetables and fruit, the abundance is not to be described. A veritable cornucopia – a horn of plenty – seems to for ever pour a shower of these good things into their houses. And their ale! To the first sight it is not tempting. It is thick, dark, a deep wine colour; a slight aroma rises from it like that which dwells in bonded warehouses. The first taste is not pleasing; but it induces a second, and a third. By and by the flavour grows upon the palate; and now beware, for if a small quantity be thrown upon the fire it will blaze up with a blue flame like pure alcohol. That dark vinous-looking ale is full of the strength of malt and hops; it is the brandy of the barley. The unwary find their heads curiously queer before they have partaken, as it seems to them, of a couple of glasses. The very spirit and character of Fleeceborough is embodied in the ale; rich, strong, genuine. No one knows what English ale is till he has tried this.

After the market dinner the guests sit still – they do not hurry away to counter and desk; they rest awhile, and dwell as it were on the flavour of their food. There is a hum of pleasant talk, for each man is a right boon companion. The burden of that talk has been the same for generations – sheep and wool, wool and sheep. Occasionally mysterious allusions are made to ‘he’, what ‘he’ will do with a certain farm, whether ‘he’ will support such and such a movement, or subscribe to some particular fund, what view will ‘he’ take of the local question of the day? Perhaps someone has had special information of the step ‘he’ is likely to take; then that favoured man is an object of the deepest interest, and is cross-

questioned 'all round the table till his small item of authentic intelligence has been thoroughly assimilated. 'He' is the resident within those vast and endless walls, with the metal gates and the gilded coronet above - the prince of this kingdom and its capital city. To rightly see the subjects loyally hastening hither, let anyone ascend the church tower on market day.

It is remarkably high, and from thence the various roads converging on the town are visible. The province lies stretched out beneath. There is the gleam of water - the little river, with its ancient mills - that flows beside the town; there are the meadows, with their pleasant footpaths. Yonder the ploughed field and woods, and yet more distant the open hills. Along every road, and there are many, the folk are hastening to their capital city, in gigs, on horseback, in dog-traps and four-wheels, or sturdily trudging afoot. The breeze comes sweet and exhilarating from the hills and over the broad acres and green woods; it strikes the chest as you lean against the parapet, and the jackdaws suspend themselves in mid-air with outstretched wings upheld by its force. For how many years, how many centuries, has this little town and this district around it been distinct and separate? In the days before the arrival of the Roman legions it was the country of a distinct tribe, or nation, of the original Britons. But if we speak of history we shall never have done, for the town and its antique abbey (of which this tower is a mere remnant) have mingled more or less in every change that has occurred, down from the earthwork camp yonder on the hills to today - down to the last puff of the locomotive there below, as its driver shuts off steam and runs in with passengers and dealers for the market, with the papers, and the latest novel from London.

Something of the old local patriotism survives, and is vigorous in the town here. Men marry in the place, find their children employment in the place, and will not move, if they can help it. Their families - well-to-do and humble alike - have been there for so many, many, years. The very carter, or the little tailor working in his shop-window, will tell you (and prove to you by records) that his ancestor stood to the barricade with pike or matchlock when the army of King or Parliament, as the case may be, besieged the sturdy town two hundred years ago. He has a longer pedigree than many a titled dweller in Belgravia. All these people believe

in Fleeceborough. When fate forces them to quit – when the young man seeks his fortune in New Zealand or America – he writes home the fullest information, and his letters published in the local print read curiously to an outsider, so full are they of local inquiries, and answers to friends who wished to know this or that. In the end he comes back – should he succeed in getting the gold which tempted him away – to pass his latter days gossiping round with the dear old folk, and to marry amongst them. Yet, with all their deep local patriotism, they are not bigoted or narrow-minded; there is too much literature abroad for that, and they have the cosiest reading-room wherein to learn all that passes in the world. They have a town council held now and then in an ancient wainscoted hall, with painted panels and coats of arms, carved oaken seats black with age, and narrow windows from which men once looked down into the street, wearing trunk hose and rapier.

But they have at least two other councils that meet much more often, and that meet by night. When his books are balanced, when his shop is shut, after he has strolled round his garden, and taken his supper, the tradesman or shopkeeper walks down to his inn, and there finds his circle assembled. They are all there, the rich and the moderately well-to-do, the struggling, and the poor. Each delivers his opinion over the social glass, or between the deliberate puffs of his cigar or pipe. The drinking is extremely moderate, the smoking not quite so temperate; but neither the glass nor the cigar are the real attractions. It is the common hall – the informal place of meeting.

It is here that the real government of the town is planned – the mere formal resolutions voted in the ancient council-room are the outcome of the open talk, and the quiet whisper here. No matter what subject is to the front, the question is always heard – What will ‘he’ do? What will ‘he’ say to it? The Volunteers compete for prizes which ‘he’ offers. The cottage hospital; the flower show; the cattle show, or agricultural exhibition; the new market buildings arose through his subscriptions and influence: the artesian well, sunk that the town might have the best of water was bored at his expense; and so on through the whole list of town affairs. When ‘he’ takes the lead all the lesser gentry – many of whom, perhaps, live in his manor houses – follow suit, and with such powerful

support to back it a movement is sure to succeed, yet 'he' is rarely seen; his hand rarely felt; everything is done, but without obtrusiveness. At these nightly councils at the chief hostelries the farmers of the district are almost as numerous as the townsmen. They ride in to hear the news and exchange their own small coin of gossip. They want to know what 'he' is going to do, and little by little of course it leaks out.

But the town is not all so loyal. There is a section which is all the more vehemently rebellious because of the spectacle of its staid and comfortable neighbours. This section is very small, but makes a considerable noise. It holds meetings and utters treasonable speeches, and denounces the 'despot' in fiery language. It protests against a free and open park; it abhors artesian wells; it detests the throwing open of nut woods that all may go forth a-nutting; it waxes righteously indignant at every gift, be it prizes for the flower show or a new market site. It scorns those mean-spirited citizens that cheer these kindly deeds. It asks why? Why should we wait till the park gates are open? Why stay till the nut woods are declared ready? Why be thankful for pure water? Why not take our own? This one man has no right to these parks and woods and pleasure grounds and vast walls; these square miles of ploughed fields, meadows and hills. By rights they should all be split up into little plots to grow our potatoes. Away with gilded coronet and watchman, batter down these walls, burn the ancient deeds and archives, put pick and lever to the tall church tower; let us have the rights of man! These violent ebullitions make not the least difference. All the insults they can devise, all the petty obstructions they can set up, the mud they can fling, does not alter the calm course of the 'despot' one jot. The artesian well is bored, and they can drink pure water or not, as pleases them. The prizes are offered, and they can compete or stand aloof. Fleeceborough smiles when it meets at night in its council-rooms, with its glass and pipe; Fleeceborough knows that the traditional policy of the Hall will continue, and that policy is acceptable to it.

What manner of man is this 'despot' and prince behind his vast walls? Verily his physique matters nothing; whether he be old or of middle age, tall or short, infirm or strong. The policy of the house keeps the actual head and owner rather in the background. His presence is never obtruded; he is rarely seen; you may stay

in his capital for months and never catch a glimpse of him. He will not appear at meetings, that every man may be free, nor hesitate to say his say, and abuse what he lists to abuse. The policy is simply perfect freedom, with support and substantial assistance to any and to every movement set on foot by the respectable men of Fleeceborough, or by the tenant farmers round about. This has been going on for generations; so that the *personnel* of the actual owner concerns little. His predecessors did it, he does it, and the next to come will do it. It is the tradition of the house. Nothing is left undone that a true princely spirit could do to improve, to beautify, or to preserve.

The antiquities of the old, old town are kept for it, and not permitted to decay; the ancient tessellated pavements of Roman villas carefully protected from the weather; the remnants of the enclosing walls which the legions built for their defence saved from destruction; the coins of the emperors and of our own early kings collected; the spurs, swords, spearheads, all the fragments of past ages arranged for inspection and study by everyone who desires to ponder over them. Chipped flints and arrowheads, the bones of animals long extinct, and the strange evidences of yet more ancient creatures that swam in the seas of the prehistoric world, these too are preserved at his cost and expense. Archaeologists, geologists, and other men of science come from afar to see these things and to carry away their lessons. The memories of the place are cherished. There was a famous poet who sang in the woods about the park; his hermitage remains, and nothing is lost that was his. Art-treasures there are, too, heirlooms to be seen behind those vast walls by any who will be at the trouble of asking.

Such is the policy of Hodge's own prince, whose silent influence is felt in every household for miles about, and felt, as all must admit, however prejudiced against the system, in this case for good. His influence reaches far beyond the bounds even of that immense property. The example communicates itself to others, and half the country responds to that pleasant impulse. It is a responsible position to hold; something, perhaps a little like that of the Medici at Florence in the olden times. But here there is no gonfalon, no golden chain of office, no velvet doublet, cloak, and rapier, no guards with arquebus or polished crossbow. An entire absence of state and ceremony marks this almost unseen but powerful sway.

The cycle of the seasons brings round times of trial here as over the entire world, but the conditions under which the trial is sustained could scarcely in our day, and under our complicated social and political system, be much more favourable.

CHAPTER XII

The Squire's 'Round Robin'

A COCK pheasant flies in frantic haste across the road, beating the air with wide-stretched wings, and fast as he goes, puts on yet a faster spurt as the shot comes rattling up through the boughs of the oak beneath him. The ground is, however, unfavourable to the sportsman, and the bird escapes. The fir copse from which the pheasant rose covers a rather sharp descent on one side of the highway. On the level above are the ploughed fields, but the slope itself is too abrupt for agricultural operations, and the soil perhaps thin and worthless. It is therefore occupied by a small plantation. On the opposite side of the road there grows a fine row of oaks in a hedge, under whose shade the dust takes long to dry when once damped by a shower. The sportsman who fired stands in the road; the beaters are above, for they desire the game to fly in a certain direction; and what with the narrow space between the firs and the oaks, the spreading boughs, and the uncertainty of the spot where the pheasant would break cover, it is not surprising that he missed.

The shot, after tearing through the boughs, rises to some height in the air, and, making a curve, falls of its own weight only, like pattering hail – and as harmless – upon an aged woman, just then trudging slowly round the corner. She is a cottager, and has been to fetch the weekly dole of parish bread that helps to support herself and infirm husband. She wears a long cloak that nearly sweeps the ground on account of her much-bowed back, and carries a flag basket full of bread in one hand, and a bulging umbrella, which answers as a walking stick, in the other. The poor old body, much startled, but not in the least injured, scuttles back round the corner, exclaiming, 'Lor! it be Filbard a-shooting; spose a'had better bide a bit till he ha' done.' She has not long to wait. The young gentleman standing in the road gets a shot at another cock;

this time the bird flies askew, instead of straight across, and so gives him a better opportunity. The pheasant falls crash among the nettles and brambles beside the road. Then a second and older gentleman emerges from the plantation, and after a time a keeper, who picks up the game.

The party then proceed along the road, and coming round the corner the great black retriever runs up to the old woman with the most friendly intentions, but to her intense confusion, for she is just in the act of dropping a lowly curtsy when the dog rubs against her. The young gentleman smiles at her alarm and calls the dog; the elder walks on utterly indifferent. A little way up the road the party get over the gate into the meadows on that side, and make for another outlying plantation. Then, and not till then, does the old woman set out again upon her slow and laborious journey. 'Filbard be just like a gatepost,' she mutters; 'a' don't take no notice of anybody.' Though she had dropped the squire so lowly a curtsy, and in his presence would have behaved with profound respect, behind his back and out of hearing she called him by his family name without any prefix. The cottagers thereabout almost always did this in speaking among themselves of their local magnate. They rarely said 'Mr'; it was generally 'Filbard', or, even more familiarly, 'Jim Filbard'. Extremes meet. They hardly dared open their mouths when they saw him, and yet spoke of him afterwards as if he sat with them at bacon and cabbage time.

Squire Filbard and one of his sons were walking round the outlying copses that October day with the object of driving the pheasants in towards the great Filbard wood, rather than of making a bag. The birds were inclined to wander about, and the squire thought a little judicious shooting round the outskirts would do good, and at the same time give his son some sport without disturbing the head of game he kept up in the wood itself. The squire was large made, tall, and well proportioned, and with a bearded, manly countenance. His neck was, perhaps, a little thick and apoplectic-looking, but burnt to a healthy brick-dust colour by exposure to the sun. The passing years had drawn some crows'-feet round the eyes, but his step was firm, his back straight, and he walked his ancestral acres every inch the master. The defect of his features was the thinness of the lips, and a want of character in a nose which did not accord with a good forehead. His hands, too,

were very large and puffy; his finger-nails (scrupulously clean) were correspondingly large, and cut to a sharp point, that seemed to project beyond the tip of the finger, and gave it a scratchy appearance.

The chimneys of Filbard Hall showed for some distance above the trees of the park, for the house stood on high ground. It was of red brick, somewhat square in style, and had little of the true Elizabethan character – it was doubtless later in date, though not modern. The chimneys, however, had a pleasing appearance over the trees; they were in stacks, and rather larger, or broader apparently at the top than where they rose from the roof. Such chimneys are not often seen on recent buildings. A chimney seems a simple matter, and yet the aspect of a house from a distance much depends upon its outline. The mansion was of large size, and stood in an extensive park, through which carriage drives swept up to the front from different lodge gates. Each of the drives passed under avenues of trees – the park seemed to stretch on either hand without enclosure or boundary – and the approach was not without a certain stateliness. Within the apartments were commodious, and from several there were really beautiful views. Some ancient furniture, handed down generation after generation, gave a character to the rooms; the oak staircase was much admired, and so was the wainscoting of one part.

The usual family portraits hung on the walls, but the present squire had rather pushed them aside in favour of his own peculiar hobby. He collected antique Italian pictures – many on panels – in the pre-Raphaelite style. Some of these he had picked up in London, others he had found and purchased on the Continent.

There were saints with glories or *nimbi* round their heads, Madonnas and kneeling Magi, the manger under a kind of pent-house, and similar subjects – subjects the highest that could be chosen. The gilding of the *nimbi* seemed well done certainly, and was still bright, but to the ordinary eye the stiffness of the figures, and lack of grace, the absence of soul in the composition was distressingly apparent. It was, however, the squire's hobby, and it must be admitted that he had very high authority upon his side. Some sensitive persons rather shrank from seeing him handle these painted panels with those peculiar scratchy fingernails; it set their teeth on edge. He gave considerable sums of money for many of

these paintings, the only liberality he permitted himself, or was capable of.

His own room or study was almost bare, and the solitary window looked on a paved passage that led to the stables. There was nothing in it but a large table, a bookcase, and two or three of the commonest horsehair chairs; the carpet was worn bare. He had selected this room because there was a door close by opening on the paved passage. Thus the bailiff of the Home Farm, the steward, the gamekeeper, the policeman, or anyone who wished to see him on business, could come to the side door from the back and be shown in to him without passing through the mansion. This certainly was a convenient arrangement; yet one would have thought that he would have a second and more private study in which to follow his own natural bent of mind. But the squire received the gardener and gave him directions about the cucumbers – for he even descended to such minutiae as that – sitting at the same table on which he had just written to an Italian art collector respecting a picture, or to some great friend begging him to come and inspect a fresh acquisition. The bookcase contained a few law books, a manual for the direction of justices – the squire was on the commission – a copy of Burke, and in one corner of a shelf a few musty papers referring to family history. These were of some value, and the squire was proud of showing them to those who took an interest in archaeology; yet he kept them much as if they had been receipts for the footman's livery, or a dozen bottles of stable medicine. He wrote with a quill pen, and as it went up and down it scratched the paper as if it had been those sharp projecting finger-nails.

In this study he spent many hours when at home – he rose late, and after breakfast repaired hither. The steward was usually in attendance. He was a commonplace man, but little above the description of a labourer. He received wages not much superior to those a labourer takes in summer time, but as he lived at the Home Farm (which was in hand) there were of course some perquisites. A slow, quiet man, of little or no education, he potted about and looked after things in general. One morning perhaps he would come in to talk with the squire about the ash wood they were going to cut in the ensuing winter, or about the oak bark which had not been paid for. Or it might be the Alderney cow or

the poultry at the Home Farm, or a few fresh tiles on the roof of the pigsty, which was decaying. A cart wanted a new pair of wheels or a shaft. One of the tenants wanted a new shed put up, but it did not seem necessary; the old one would do very well if people were not so fidgety. The wife or daughter of one of the cottage people was taking to drink and getting into bad ways. This or that farmer had had some sheep die. Another farmer had bought some new silver-mounted harness, and so on, through all the village gossip.

Often it was the gamekeeper instead of the steward who came in or was sent for. The squire kept a large head of pheasants for certain reasons, but he was not over-anxious to pay for them. The keeper grumbled about his wages, that he had no perquisites, and that the shooting season never brought him any fees – unless the squire let the place; he only wished he let it every year. This, of course, was said aside; to the squire he was hat in hand. He had to produce his vouchers for food for the pheasants, and dogs, and to give particulars why a certain gate on the plantation wanted renewing. The steward had seen it, and thought it might be repaired; why did the keeper think it ought to be renewed altogether? And was there not plenty of larch timber lying about, that had been thrown and not sold, that would make a very good spar-gate, without purchasing one? Why couldn't old Hooker, the hedge carpenter, knock it up cheap?

Next came the coachman – the squire did not keep up anything of a stud, just enough to work the carriage, and some ordinary riding horses and a pony for the children. The coachman had to explain why a new lock was wanted on the stable door; why the blacksmith's bill was so much for shoes; after which there was a long gossip about the horses of a gentleman who had come down and rented a place for the season. The gardener sometimes had an interview about the quantity of apples that might be sold from the orchard, and twenty other peddling details, in which the squire delighted. As for the butler, time at last had brought him to bear with patience the inquisition about the waste corks and the empty bottles.

The squire would have had the cook in and discussed the stock-pot with her for a full hour, but the cook set up her back. She wouldn't, no, that she wouldn't; and the squire found that the

cook was mistress of the situation. She was the only personage who did not pass him with deference. She tossed her head, and told her fellow-servants audibly that he was a poor, mean-spirited man; and as for missis, she was a regular Tartar – there! In this they thoroughly agreed. The coachman and footman, when out with the carriage, and chancing to get a talk with other coachmen and footmen, were full of it. He was the meanest master they had ever known; yet they could not say that he paid less wages, or that they were ill-fed – it was this meddling, peddling interference they resented. The groom, when he rode into town for the letter-bag, always stopped to tell his friends some fresh instance of it. All the shopkeepers and tradesmen, and everybody else, had heard of it. But they were none the less obsequious when the squire passed up the street. The servants were never so glad as when young master came home with the liberal views imbibed in modern centres of learning, and with a free, frank mode of speech. But miss, the sole daughter, they simply hated; she seemed to have ten times the meanness of her papa, and had been a tell-tale from childhood. The kitchen said she saved her curl papers to sell as waste paper.

The 'missis' was as haughty, as unapproachable and disdainful as the master was inquisitive; she never spoke to, looked at, nor acknowledged anyone – except the three largest tenants and their wives. To these, who paid heavily, she was gracious. She dressed in the very extreme and front of fashion – the squire himself quite plainly, without the least pretence of dandyism. Hateful as the village folk thought her hauteur and open contempt for them, they said she was more the lady than the squire was the gentleman.

The squire's time, when at home, like everything else, was peddled away. He rode into market one day of the week; he went to church on Sundays with unfailing regularity, and he generally attended the petty sessional bench on a third day. Upon the bench, from the long standing of his family, he occupied a prominent position. His mind invariably seized the minutiae of the evidence, and never seemed to see the point or the broad bearings of the case. He would utterly confuse a truthful witness, for instance, who chanced to say that he met the defendant in the road. 'But you said just now that you and he were both going the same way, how, then could you meet him?' the squire would ask, frowning

sternly. Whether the witness overtook or met the defendant mattered nothing to the point at issue; but the squire, having got a satisfactory explanation, turned aside, with an aggravating air of cleverness. For the rest of the week the squire could not account for his time. He sometimes, indeed, in the hunting season, rode to the meet, but he rarely followed. He had none of the enthusiasm that makes a hunter; besides, it made the horse in such a heat, and would work him out too quick for economy.

He went out shooting, but not in regular trim. He would carry his gun across to the Home Farm, and knock over a rabbit on the way; then spend two hours looking at the Alderney cow, the roof of the pigsty, and the poultry, and presently stroll across a corner of the wood, and shoot a pheasant. The head of game was kept up for the purpose of letting the mansion from time to time when the squire or his lady thought it desirable to go on the Continent, that the daughter might acquire the graces of travel. A visit to London in the season, a visit to the seaside, and then home in the autumn to peddle about the estate, made up the year when they did not go abroad. There was a broad park, noble trees, a great mansion, a stately approach; but within it seemed all littleness of spirit.

The squire's own private study – the morning-room of the owner of this fine estate – was, as previously observed, next the passage that led to the stables, and the one window looked out on a blank wall. It was in this room that he conducted his business and pleasure, and his art researches. It was here that he received the famous 'Round Robin' from his tenants. The estate was not very large – something between 3,000 and 4,000 acres – but much of it was good and fertile, though heavy land, and highly rented. Had the squire received the whole of his rents for his own private use he would have been well off as squires go. But there was a flaw or hitch somewhere in the right, or title, or succession. No one knew the precise circumstances, because, like so many similar family disputes, when the lawyers were ready, and the case had come before the tribunal, a compromise was arrived at, the terms of which were only known to the tribunal and the parties directly concerned.

But everybody knew that the squire had to pay heavy pensions to various members of another branch of the family; and it was imagined that he did not feel quite fixed in the tenure – that

possibly the case might under circumstances, be heard of again – since it was noticed that he did not plant trees, or make improvements, or in any way proceed to increase the permanent attractions of the estate. It seemed as if he felt he was only lodging there. He appeared to try and get all he could off the place – without absolute damage – and to invest or spend nothing. After all these payments had been made the squire's income was much reduced, and thus, with all these broad acres, these extensive woods, and park, and mansion, pleasure grounds, game, and so forth, he was really a poor man. Not poor in the sense of actual want, but a man in his position had, of course, a certain appearance to keep up. Horses, carriages – even cooks – are not to be had for nothing, and are absolutely essential to those who are compelled to maintain any kind of dignity. Sons with liberal ideas are expensive; a daughter is expensive; a wife who insists on dressing in the fashion is expensive.

Now, taking all these things into consideration, and remembering, too, that the squire as a good father (which he was admittedly) wished to make provision for the future of his children, it may, perhaps, after all, be questioned whether he really was so mean and little of spirit as appeared. Under the circumstances, if he wished to save, the only way open to him was to be careful in little things. Even his hobby – the pre-Raphaelite pictures – was not without its advantage in this sense; the collection was certainly worth more than he gave for it, for he got it all by careful bargaining, and it could be sold again at a profit. The careful superintendence of the Alderney cow, the cucumber frames, and the rabbits, might all be carried out for the very best of objects, the good of his children.

Now, the squire was, of course, very well aware of the troubles of agriculture, the wetness of the seasons – which played havoc with the game – the low prices, and the loud talk that was going on around him. But he made no sign. He might have been deaf, dumb, and blind. He walked by the wheat, but did not see the deficiency of the crop, nor the extraordinary growth of weeds. There were voices in the air like the mutterings of a coming storm, but he did not hear them. There were paragraphs in the papers – how So-and-so had liberally reduced the rents or returned a percentage; but he did not read them, or did not understand. Rent days came and went, and no sign was made. His solicitor

received the rents, but nothing could be got out of him by the farmers. The little farmers hardly liked to take the lead: some of them did not dare. The three largest farmers looked at each other and wondered which would speak first. They were awkwardly situated. The squire's wife acknowledged their wives and daughters and once now and then deigned to invite them to the mansion. The squire himself presented them with specimens of a valuable breed of poultry he was bringing up at the Home Farm. It was difficult to begin unpleasant business.

Meantime the solicitor gathered up the cheques, wished them good afternoon and departed. Another rent day came round, and still no sign. The squire's policy was, in fact, to ignore. He ignored the depression altogether – could not see that it existed in that county at all. Recollect, it was the only policy open to him. Whether the rents paid to him were large or small, his expenses would be the same. There were the members of the other branch of the family to be paid in full. There were the carriages, the servants, the gamekeepers, and so on. He could reduce nothing; no wonder that he was slow to acknowledge that he must be himself reduced. The fatal day – so long dreaded – came at last.

A large letter lay on the table in the study one morning, along with the other letters. He did not recognize the handwriting, and naturally opened it first. It was a 'Round Robin' from the tenants. All had signed a memorial, setting forth the depression, and respectfully, even humbly, asking that their case be taken into consideration, and that a percentage be returned, or the rent reduced. Their heavy land, they pointed out, had been peculiarly difficult to work in such seasons. They had suffered exceptionally, and they trusted he would take no offence. But there was an unmistakable hint that they were in earnest. All signed it – from the ungrateful largest tenants, who had had presents of poultry, and whose wives had been smiled upon, down to the smallest working farmer, who could hardly be distinguished from his own labourers.

The squire read the names over twice, pointing to each with his sharp, scratchy finger-nail. There were other letters from the members of the other branch of the family whose pensions were just due in full. Suppose he returned ten per cent of the rents to the tenants, that would not be like ten per cent upon the entire rental, but perhaps twenty-five or thirty per cent upon that portion of the

rental which actually went into his own pocket. A man can hardly be expected to cheerfully tender other people a third of his income. But sprawling and ill-written as many of the signatures were to the 'Round Robin' – the pen held by heavy hands – yet they were genuine, and constituted a very substantial fact, that must be yielded to.

CHAPTER XIII

An Ambitious Squire

PERHAPS the magistrate most regular in his attendance at a certain country Petty Sessional Court is young Squire Marthorne. Those who have had business to transact at such Courts know the difficulty that often arises from the absence of a second magistrate, there being a numerous class of cases with which one justice of the peace is not permitted to deal. There must be two, and it sometimes happens that only one is forthcoming. The procedure adopted varies much in different divisions, according to the population and the percentage of charges brought up. Usually a particular day is appointed when it is understood that a full bench will be present, but it not unfrequently happens that another and less formal meeting has to be held, at which the attendance is uncertain. The district in which Mr Marthorne resides chances to be somewhat populous, and to include one or two turbulent places that furnish a steady supply of offenders. The practice is therefore to hold two Courts a week; at one of these, on the Saturday, the more important cases are arranged to be heard, when there are always plenty of magistrates. At the other, on the Tuesday, remands and smaller matters are taken, and there then used to be some delay.

One justice thought his neighbour would go, another thought the same of his neighbour, and the result was nobody went. Having tacitly bound themselves to attend once a week, the justices, many of whom resided miles away, did not care formally to pledge themselves to be invariably present on a second day. Sometimes the business on that second day was next to nothing, but occasionally serious affairs turned up, when messengers had to be dispatched to gather a quorum.

But latterly this uncertainty had been put an end to through the regular attendance of young Squire Marthorne, of Marthorne House. The Marthornes are an old family, and one of the best

connected in the county, though by no means rich, and whether it was the lack of great wealth, or a want of energy, they had until recently rather dropped out of the governing circle. When, however, the young squire, soon after his accession to the property, in the natural course of events, was nominated to the Commission of the Peace, he began to exhibit qualities calculated to bring him to the front. He developed an aptitude for business, and at the same time showed a personal tact and judgment which seemed to promise a future very different from the previous stagnation of his family.

These qualities came first into play at the Petty Sessions, which, apart from the criminal business, is practically an informal weekly Parliament of local landowners. Marthorne, of course, was well known to the rest long before his appearance among them as a colleague. He had gained some reputation at college; but that had long since been forgotten in the prestige he had attained as a brilliant foxhunter. Even in the days before his accession, when his finances were notoriously low, he had somehow contrived to ride a first-rate horse. Everybody likes a man who rides a good horse. At the same time there was nothing horsey about him; he was always the gentleman. Since his succession the young squire, as he was familiarly described – most of the others being elderly – had selected his horses with such skill that it was well known a very great man had noticed them, so that when he came to the Bench, young as he was, Marthorne escaped the unpleasant process of finding his level – i.e. being thoroughly put down.

If not received quite as an equal by that assemblage of elderly gentlemen, he was made to feel that at all events they would listen to what he had to say. That is a very great point gained. Marthorne used his advantage with judgment. He displayed a modesty highly commendable in a young man. He listened, and only spoke for the purpose of acquiring information. Nothing is so pleasing as to find a man of intelligence willingly constituting himself your pupil. They were all anxious to teach him the business of the county, and the more he endeavoured to learn from them the cleverer they thought him.

Now, the business of the county was not very intricate; the details were innumerable, but the general drift was easy to acquire. Much more complicated to see through were all the little personal

likings, dislikings, petty spites, foibles, hobbies, secret understandings, family jars, and so forth, which really decide a man's vote, or the scale into which he throws his influence. There were scores of squires dotted over the county, each of whom possessed local power more or less considerable, and each of whom might perchance have private relations with men who held high office in the State. Every family had its history and its archives containing records of negotiations with other families. People who met with all outward friendliness, and belonged to the same party, might have grudges half a century old, but not yet forgotten. If you made friends with one, you might mortally offend the other. The other would say nothing, but another day a whisper to some great authority might destroy the hopes of the aspirant. Those who would attain to power must study the inner social life, and learn the secret motives that animate men. But to get at the secret behind the speech, the private thought behind the vote, would occupy one for years.

Marthorne, of course, having been bred and born in the circle, knew the main facts; but, when he came to really set himself to work, he quickly felt that he was ignorant, and that at any moment he might irritate someone's hidden prejudice. He looked round for an older man who knew all about it, and could inform him. This man he found in the person of the Vice-Chairman of the Petty Sessions. The nominal Chairman, like many other unpaid officials, held the place because of old family greatness, not from any personal ability – family greatness which was in reality a mere tradition. The Vice-Chairman was the true centre and spirit of the circle.

A man of vast aptitude for details, he liked county business for its own sake, and understood every technicality. With little or no personal ambition, he had assisted in every political and social movement in the county for half a century, and knew the secret motives of every individual landowner. With large wealth, nothing to do, and childless, he took a liking to young Marthorne. The old man wished for nothing better than to talk; the young squire listened attentively. The old man was delighted to find someone who would sit with him through the long hours of Petty Sessional business. Thus it was that the people who had to attend the Local Board, whether it was a Saturday, the principal day, or whether it

was a Tuesday, that had previously been so trying, found their business facilitated by the attendance of two magistrates. The Vice-Chairman was always there, and Mr Marthorne was always there. It sometimes happened that while Hodge the lately intoxicated, or Hodge the recent pugilist was stolidly waiting for his sentence, the two justices in the retiring room were convulsed with laughter; the one recounting, the other imbibing, some curious racy anecdote concerning the family history of a local magnate.

Meantime, the young squire was steadily gaining a reputation for solid qualities, for work and application. Not only at the Bench, but at the Board of Guardians and at other Boards where the Justice of the Peace is *ex officio* a member, he steadily worked at details, sat patiently upon committees, audited endless accounts, read interminable reports and was never weary of work. The farmers began to talk about him, and to remark to each other what a wonderful talent for business he possessed, and what a pleasant-speaking young gentleman he was. The applause was well earned, for probably there is no duller or more monotonous work than that of attending Boards which never declare dividends. He next appeared at the farmers' club, at first as a mere spectator, and next, though, with evident diffidence, as a speaker.

Marthorne was no orator; he felt when he stood up to speak an odd sensation in the throat, as if the glottis had contracted. He was, in fact, very nervous, and for the first two or three sentences had not the least idea what he had said. But he forced himself to say it – his will overruled his physical weakness. When said it was not much – only a few safe platitudes – but it was a distinct advance. He felt that next time he should do better, and that his tongue would obey his mind. His remarks appeared in the local print, and he had started as a speaker. He was resolved to be a speaker, for it is evident to all that, without frequent public speech, no one can now be a representative man. Marthorne, after this, never lost an opportunity of speaking – if merely to second a resolution, to propose a toast, he made the most of it. One rule he laid down for himself, namely, never to say anything original. He was not speaking to propound a new theory, a new creed, or view of life. His aim was to become the mouthpiece of his party. Most probably the thought that seemed to him so clever might, if publicly expressed, offend some important people. He, therefore, carefully avoided

anything original. High authorities are now never silent; when Parliament closes they still continue to address the public, and generally upon more or less stirring questions of the time.

In those addresses, delivered by the very leaders of his own party, Marthorne found the material, and caught from their diligent perusal the spirit in which to use it. In this way, without uttering a single original idea of his own, and with very little originality of expression, the young orator succeeded perfectly in his aim. First, he became recognized as a speaker, and, therefore, extremely useful; secondly, he was recognized as one of the soundest exponents of politics in the county. Marthorne was not only clever, but 'safe'. His reputation for the latter quality was of even more service to him than for talent; to be 'safe' in such things is a very great recommendation. Personal reputation is of slow growth, but it does grow. The Vice-Chairman, Marthorne's friend and mentor, had connections with very high people indeed. He mentioned Marthorne to the very high people. These, in their turn, occasionally cast a glance at what Marthorne was doing. Now and then they read a speech of his, and thought it extremely good, solid, and well put. It was understood that a certain M.P. would retire at the next election; and they asked themselves whom they had to take his place?

While this important question was exercising the minds of those in authority, Marthorne was energetically at work gaining the social suffrage. The young squire's lady – he had married in his minority for beauty and intelligence, and not for money – was discovered to be a very interesting young person. Her beauty and intelligence, and, let it be added, her true devotion to her husband's cause, proved of fifty times more value to him than a dowry of many manors. Her tact smoothed the way everywhere; she made friends for him in all directions, especially perhaps during the London season. Under the whirl and glitter of that fascinating time there are latent possibilities of important business. Both Marthorne and his lady had by birth and connections the entree into leading circles; but many who have that entree never attain to more influence in society than the furniture of the drawing-room.

These two never for a moment lost sight of the country while they enjoyed themselves in town. Everything they said or did was

said and done with a view to conciliate people who might have direct or indirect influence in the country. In these matters, ladies of position still retain considerable power in their hands. The young squire and his wife put themselves to immense trouble to get the good will of such persons, and being of engaging manners they in time succeeded. This was not effected at once, but three or four years are a very short time in which to develop personal influence, and their success within so brief a period argues considerable skill.

At home again in the autumn the same efforts were diligently continued. The mansion itself was but of moderate size and by no means convenient, but the squire's lady transformed it from a gaunt, commonplace country house into an elegant and charming residence. This she contrived without great expense by the exercise of good taste and a gift for discriminating between what was and what was not *apropos*. The exterior she left alone – to alter an exterior costs a heavy sum and often fails. But the interior she gradually fitted in a novel style, almost entirely after her own design. The gardens, too, under her supervision, became equally inviting. The house got talked about, and was itself a social success.

On his part, the squire paid as much attention to the estate. It was not large, far from sufficient of itself, indeed, to support any social or political pretensions without the most rigid economy. And the pair were rigidly economical. The lady dressed in the height of the fashion, and drove the most beautiful horses, and yet she never wasted a shilling upon herself. Her own little private whims and fancies she resolutely refused to gratify. Every coin was spent where it would produce effect. In like manner, the squire literally never had half a sovereign in his pocket. He selected the wines in his cellar with the greatest care, and paid for them prices which the wine merchant, in these days of cheap wines, was unaccustomed to receive from men of thrice his income. The squire paid for the very best wine, and in private drank a cheap claret. But his guests, many of them elderly gentlemen, when once they had dined with him never forgot to come again. His bins became known throughout the county; very influential people indeed spoke of them with affection. It was in this way that the squire got a high value out of his by no means extensive rents.

He also looked after the estate personally. Hodge, eating his luncheon under the hedge in October, as he slowly munched his crust, watched the squire strolling about the fields, with his gun under his arm, and wondered why he did not try the turnips. The squire never went into the turnip field, and seemed quite oblivious that he carried a gun, for when a covey rose at his feet he did not fire, but simply marked them down. His mind, in fact, was busy with more important matters, and, fond as he was of shooting, he wanted the birds for someone else's delectation. After he had the place a little while, there was not a square inch of waste ground to be found. When the tenants were callous to hints, the squire gave them pretty clearly to understand that he meant his land to be improved, and improved it was. He himself of his own free motive and initiative ordered new buildings to be erected where he, by personal inspection, saw that they would pay. He drained to some extent, but not very largely, thinking that capital sunk in drains, except in particular soils, did not return for many years.

Anxious as he was to keep plenty of game, he killed off the rabbits, and grubbed up many of the small covers at the corners and sides of arable fields which the tenants believed injurious to crops. He repaired labourers' cottages, and added offices to farmsteads. In short, he did everything that could be done without too heavy an expenditure. To kill off the rabbits, to grub up the smaller covers, to drain the marshy spots, to thatch the cottages, put up cattle sheds, and so on, could be effected without burdening the estate with a loan. But, small as these improvements were in themselves, yet, taken together, they made an appreciable difference.

There was a distinct increase in the revenue of the estate after the first two years. The increase arose in part from the diminished expenses, for it has been found that a tumbledown place is more costly to maintain than one in good repair. The tenants at first were rather alarmed, fearing lest the change should end in a general rise of rents. It did not. The squire only asked an increase when he had admittedly raised the value of the land, and then only to a moderate amount. By degrees he acquired a reputation as the most just of landlords. His tenantry were not only satisfied, but proud of him; for they began to foresee what was going to happen.

Yet all these things had been done for his own interest – so true is it that the interest of the landlord and the tenant are identical. The squire had simply acted judiciously, and from personal inspection. He studied his estate, and attended to it personally. Of course he could not have done these things had he not succeeded to a place but little encumbered with family settlements. He did them from interested motives, and not from mere sentiment. But, nevertheless, credit of a high order was justly accorded to him. So young a man might naturally have expended his income on pleasure. So young a wife might have spent his rents in frivolity. They worked towards an end, but it was a worthy end – for ambition, if not too extravagant, is a virtue. Men with votes and influence compared this squire in their minds with other squires, whose lives seemed spent in a slumberous do-nothingness.

Thus, by degrees, the young squire's mansion and estate added to his reputation. The labour which all this represented was immense. Both the squire and his wife worked harder than a merchant in his office. Attending Boards and farmers' clubs, making speeches, carrying on correspondence, looking after the estate, discharging social duties, filled up every moment of his time. Superintending the house, the garden, corresponding, and a hundred other labours, filled up every moment of hers. They were never idle; to rise socially and politically requires as great or greater work than for a poor man to achieve a fortune.

Ultimately the desired result began to be apparent. There grew up a general feeling that the squire was the best man for the place in Parliament, which, in the course of events, must ere long be vacant. There was much heartburning and jealousy secretly felt among men twice his age, who had waited and hoped for years for for such an opening, till at last they had rusted and become incapable of effort. But, cynical as they might be in private, they were too wise to go openly against the stream. A few friendly words spoken in season by a great man whose good will had been gained decided the matter. At an informal meeting of the party – how much more is effected at informal than at formal assemblies! – Marthorne was introduced as the successor to the then representative. The young squire's estate could not, of course, bear the heavy pecuniary strain which must arise; but before those who had the control of these things finally selected him they had ascertained

that there would be no difficulty with respect to money. Marthorne's old friend and mentor, the wealthy Vice-Chairman of the Petty Sessions, who had inducted him into the county business, announced that he should bear the larger part of the expense. He was not a little proud of his *protégé*.

The same old friend and mentor, wise with the knowledge and experience which long observation of men had given him, advised the young squire what to do when the depression first came into agriculture. The old man said, 'Meet it; very likely it will not last two years. What is that in the life of an estate?' So the young squire met it, and announced at once that he should return a percentage of his rents. 'But not too high a percentage,' said the old man; 'let us ascertain what the rest of the landowners think, else by a too liberal reduction you may seem to cast a reflection upon them.' The percentage was returned, and continued, and the young squire tided over the difficulty.

His own tenantry and the farming interest generally are proud of him. Hodge, who, slow as he is, likes a real man, says, 'He beant such a bad sort of a veller, you; a' beant above speaking to we!' When the time comes the young squire will certainly be returned.

CHAPTER XIV

The Parson's Wife

IT is pleasant on a sunny day to walk through a field of wheat when the footpath is bordered on either side by the ripening crop, without the intervention of hedge or fence. Such a footpath, narrow, but well kept, leads from a certain country churchyard to the highway road, and passes on the way a wicket gate in a thick evergreen shrubbery which surrounds the vicarage lawn and gardens. This afternoon the wheat stands still and upright, without a motion, in the burning sunshine, for the sun, though he has sloped a little from his highest meridian altitude, pours an even fiercer beam than at the exact hour of noon. The shadeless field is exposed to the full glare of the brilliant light. There are no trees in the field itself, the hedges are cut low and trimmed to the smallest proportions, and are devoid of timber; and, as the ground is high and close to the hills, all the trees in sight are beneath, and can be overlooked. Whether in sunshine or storm there is no shelter – no medium; the wind rushes over with its utmost fury, or the heat rests on it undisturbed by the faintest current. Yet, sultry as it is, the footpath is a pleasant one to follow.

The wheat ears, all but ripe – to the ordinary eye they are ripe, but the farmer is not quite satisfied – rise to the waist or higher, and tempt the hand to pluck them. Butterflies flutter over the surface, now descending to some flower hidden beneath, now resuming their joyous journey. There is a rich ripe feeling in the very atmosphere, the earth is yielding her wealth, and a delicate aroma rises from her generous gifts. Far as the eye can see, the rolling plains and slopes present various tints of yellow – wheat in different stages of ripeness, or of different kinds; oats and barley – till the hedges and woods of the vale conceal the farther landscape on the one hand, and the ridge of the hills upon the other

Nothing conveys so strong an impression of substantial wealth

as the view of wheatfields. A diamond ornament in a window may be ticketed as worth so many hundreds of pounds; but the glittering gem, and the sum it represents, seem rather abstract than real. But the wheat, the golden wheat, is a great fact that seizes hold of the mind; the idea comes of itself that it represents solid wealth.

The tiles of the vicarage roof – all of the house visible above the shrubbery – look so hot and dry in the glaring sunshine that it does not seem possible for vegetation to exist upon them; yet they are tinted with lichen. The shrubbery has an inviting coolness about it – the thick evergreens, the hollies on which the berries are now green, the cedars and ornamental trees planted so close together that the passer-by cannot see through, must surely afford a grateful shade – a contrast with the heat of the wheatfield and the dust of the highway below. Just without the wicket gate a goat standing upon his hind legs, his fore legs placed against the palings, is industriously nibbling the tenderest leaves of the shrubs and trees which he can reach. Thus extended to his full length he can reach considerably higher than might be supposed, and is capable of much destruction. Doubtless he has got out of bounds.

Inside the enclosure the reverend gentleman himself reclines in an armchair of canework placed under the shade of the verandah, just without the glass door or window opening from the drawing-room upon the lawn. His head has fallen back and a little to one side, and an open book lies on his knee; his soft felt hat is bent and crumpled; he has yielded to the heat and is slumbering. The blinds are partly down the window, but a glimpse can be obtained of a luxurious carpet, of tables in valuable woods and inlaid, of a fine piano, of china, and the thousand and one knick-knacks of highly civilized life. The reverend gentleman's suit of black, however, is not new; it is, on the contrary, decidedly rusty, and the sole of one of his boots, which is visible, is much worn. Over his head the roses twine round the pillars of the verandah, and there is a *parterre* of brilliant flowers not far from his feet.

His wife sits, a few yards distant, under a weeping ash, whose well-trained boughs make a perfect tent, and shield her from the sun. She has a small table before her, and writing materials, and is making notes with the utmost dispatch from some paper or journal. She is no longer young, and there are the marks of much care and trouble on her forehead; but she has still a pleasing expression

upon her features, her hands are exquisitely white, and her figure, once really good, retains some of the outline that rendered it beautiful. Wherever you saw her you would say: That is a lady. But her dress, tasteful though it be, is made of the cheapest material, and looks, indeed, as if it has been carefully folded away last summer, and was now brought out to do duty a second time.

The slow rumble of waggon wheels goes down the road, close to the lawn, but concealed by the trees, against whose boughs the sheaves of the load rustle as they go past. Wealth rolling by upon the waggon, wealth in the well-kept garden, in the smart lawn, in the roses, the bright flowers, the substantial well-furnished house, the luxurious carpet, and the china; wealth, too, all around in the vast expanse of ripening wheat. He has nothing to do but to slumber in the cane chair and receive his tithe of the harvest. She has nothing to do but sit under the shadow of the weeping ash and dream dreams, or write verses. Such, at least, might be the first impression.

The publication from which she is so earnestly making notes is occupied with the management of bees, and she is so busy because the paper is only borrowed, and has to be returned. Most of the papers and books that come to the vicarage have to be hastily read for the same reason. Mrs F— is doing her very best and hardest to increase the Rev. F—'s income; she has tried to do so for some years, and despite repeated failures is bravely, perhaps a little wearily, still trying. There is not much left for her to experiment with. The goat surreptitiously nibbling the valuable shrubs outside the palings is a member of a flock that once seemed to promise fair. Goats at one time (she was persuaded) were the means of ready wealth — they could live anywhere, on anything (the shrubs to wit), and yielded such rich milk; it far surpassed that of the shorthorn; there was the analysis to prove it! Such milk must of course be worth money, besides which there were the kids, and the cheese and butter.

Alas! the goats quickly obtained so evil a reputation, worse than that of the rabbits for biting off the shooting vegetation, that no one would have them on the land. The milk was all the analysis declared it, but in that outlying village, which did not contain two houses above the quality of a farmstead, there was no one to buy

it. There was a prejudice against the butter which could not be got over; and the cheese – well, the cheese resembled a tablet of dark soap. Hodge would not eat it at a gift; he smelt it, picked a morsel off on the tip of his clasp knife, and threw it aside in contempt. One by one the goats were got rid of, and now but two or three remained; she could not make up her mind to part with all, for living creatures, however greatly they have disappointed, always enlist the sympathies of women.

Poultry was the next grand discovery – they ate their heads off, refused to lay eggs, and, when by frequent purchases they became numerous and promised to pay, quickly died by the score, seized by an epidemic. She learnt in visiting the cottagers how profitable their allotment gardens were to them, and naturally proceeded to argue that a larger piece of ground would yield a proportionately larger profit if cultivated on the same principle. If the cottagers could pay a rent for an acre which, in the aggregate, was three times that given by the ordinary farmer, and could even then make a good thing of it, surely intelligence and skill might do the same on a more extended scale. How very foolish the farmers were! they might raise at least four times the produce they did, and they might pay three times the rent. As the *viçar* had some hundred and fifty acres of glebe let at the usual agricultural rent, if the tenants could be persuaded or instructed to farm on the cottagers' systems, what an immense increase it would be to his income! The tenants, however, did not see it. They shrugged their shoulders, and made no movement. The energetic lady resolved to set an example, and to prove to them that they were wrong.

She rented an acre of arable land (at the side of the field) giving the tenant a fair price for it. First it had to be enclosed so as to be parted off from the open field. The cost of the palings made the vicar wince; his lady duly set it down to debit. She planted one-half potatoes, as they paid thirty pounds per acre, and on the rest put in hundreds of currant bushes, set a strawberry bed and an asparagus bed, on the principle that luxuries of that kind fetch a high price and occupy no more space than cabbages. As the acre was cultivated entirely by the spade, the cost of the labour expended upon it ran up the figures on the debit side to an amount which rather startled her. But the most dispiriting part of the commencement was the length of time to wait before a crop came.

According to her calculations that represented so much idle capital sunk, instead of being rapidly turned over. However she consoled herself with the pigsty, in which were half a dozen animals, whose feeding she often personally superintended.

The potatoes failed, and did not pay for the digging; the currant bushes were blighted; the strawberries were eaten by snails, and, of course, no asparagus could be cut for three years; a little item, this last, quite overlooked. The pigs returned exactly the sum spent on them; there was neither profit nor loss, and there did not appear any chance of making a fortune out of pork. The lady had to abandon the experiment quite disheartened, and found that, after all her care and energy, her books showed a loss of fifteen pounds. It was wonderful it was not more; labour was so expensive, and no doubt she was cheated right and left.

She next tried to utilize her natural abilities, and to turn her accomplishments to account. She painted; she illuminated texts; she undertook difficult needlework of various kinds, in answer to advertisements which promised ample remunerations for a few hours' labour. Fifteen hours' hard work she found was worth just threepence, and the materials cost one shilling; consequently she laboriously worked herself poorer by ninepence.

Finally, she was studying bees, which really seemed to hold out some prospect of success. Yonder were the hills where they could find thyme in abundance; the fields around supplied clover; and the meadows below were full of flowers. So that hot summer day, under the weeping ash, she was deep in the study of the 'Ligurian queen', the 'super' system, the mysteries of 'driving', and was making sketches of patent hives. Looking up from her sketch she saw that her husband had fallen asleep, and stayed to gaze at him thoughtfully.

He looked worn, and older than he really was; as if rest or change would do him good; as if he required luxuries and petting. She sighed, and wondered whether the bees would enable her to buy him such things, for though the house was well furnished and apparently surrounded with wealth, they were extremely poor. Yet she did not care for money for their own household use so much as to give him the weight in parish affairs he so sadly needed. She felt that he was pushed aside, treated as a cipher, and that he had little of the influence that properly belonged to him. Her two

daughters, their only children, were comfortably, though not grandly, married and settled; there was no family anxiety. But the work, the parish, the people, all seemed to have slipped out of her husband's hands. She could not but acknowledge that he was too quiet and yielding, that he lacked the brazen voice, the personal force that imposes upon men. But surely his good intentions, his way of life, his gentle kindness should carry sway. Instead of which the parish seemed to have left the Church, and the parson was outside the real modern life of the village. No matter what he did, even if popular, it soon seemed to pass out of his hands.

There was the school, for instance. He could indeed go across and visit it, but he had no control, no more than the veriest stranger that strolled along the road. He had always been anxious for a good school, and had done the best he could with means so limited before the new Acts came into operation. When they were passed he was the first to endeavour to carry them out and to save the village the cost and the possible quarrelling of a school board. He went through all the preliminary work, and reconciled, as far as possible, the jarring interests that came to play. The two largest landlords of the place were unfortunately not on good terms. Whatever the one did the other was jealous of, so that when one promised the necessary land for the school, and it was accepted, the other withdrew his patronage, and declined to subscribe. With great efforts, the vicar, nevertheless, got the school erected, and to all appearance the difficulty was surmounted.

But when the Government inspection took place it was found that, though not nearly filled with scholars, there was not sufficient cubic space to include the children of a distant outlying hamlet, which the vicar had hoped to manage by a dame school. These poor children, ill fed and young, could hardly stand walking to and from the village school – a matter of some five miles daily, and which in winter and wet weather was, in itself, a day's work for their weary little limbs. As the vicar could not raise money enough to pay a certificated teacher at the proposed branch, or dame school, the scheme had to be abandoned. Then, according to red tape, it was necessary to enlarge the village school to accommodate these few children, and this notwithstanding that the building was never full. The enlargement necessitated a great additional expenditure. The ratepayers did, indeed, after much bickering and much persua-

sion, in the end pay off the deficiency; but, in the meantime, the village had been brought to the verge of a school board.

Religious differences came to the front – there was, in fact, a trial of force between the two denominations. Till then, for many years these differences had slumbered and been almost forgotten; they were now brought into collision, and the social quiet of the place was upset. A council of the chief farmers and some others was ultimately formed, and, as a matter of fact, really did represent the inhabitants fairly well. But while it represented the parish, it left the vicar quite outside. He had a voice, but nothing more. He was not the centre – the controlling spirit.

He bore it meekly enough, so far as he was personally concerned; but he grieved about it in connection with his deep religious feelings and his Church. The Church was not in the front of all, as it should be. It was hard after all his labour; the rebuffs, the bitter remarks, the sneers of those who had divergent views, and, perhaps worse than all, the cold indifference and apathy of those who wished things to remain in the old state, ignoring the fact that the law would not suffer it. There were many other things besides the school, but they all went the same way. The modern institution was introduced, championed by the Church, worked for by the Church, but when at last it was successful, somehow or other it seemed to have severed itself from the Church altogether. The vicar walked about the village, and felt that, though nominally in it, he was really out of it.

His wife saw it too, still more clearly than he did. She saw that he had none of the gift of getting money out of people. Some men seem only to have to come in contact with others to at once receive the fruits of their dormant benevolent feelings. The rich man writes his cheque for £100, the middle-class well-to-do sends his bank-notes for £20, the comfortable middle-class man his sovereigns. A testimonial is got up, an address engrossed on vellum, speeches are made, and a purse handed over containing a draft for so many hundreds, 'in recognition, not in reward, of your long continued and successful ministrations.' The art of causing the purse-strings to open is an art that is not so well understood, perhaps, among the orthodox as by the unorthodox. The Rev. F— either could not, or would not, or did not know how to ask, and he did not receive.

Just at present his finances were especially low. The tenants who farmed the glebe land threatened to quit unless their rents were materially reduced, and unless a considerable sum was expended upon improvements. To some very rich men the reduction of rents has made a sensible difference; to the Rev. F— it meant serious privations. But he had no choice; he had to be satisfied with that or nothing. Then the vicarage house, though substantial and pleasant to look at, was not in a good state within. The rain came through in more places than one, and the ancient woodwork of the roof was rotten. He had already done considerable repairing, and knew that he must soon do more. The nominal income of the living was but moderate; but when the reductions were made nothing but a cheese-paring seemed left. From this his subscriptions to certain ecclesiastical institutions had to be deducted.

Lastly, he had received a hint that a curate ought to be kept now that his increasing age rendered him less active than before. There was less hope now than ever of anything being done for him in the parish. The landowners complained of rent reductions, of farms idle on their hands, and of increasing expenses. The farmers grumbled about the inclement seasons, their continual losses, and the falling markets. It was not a time when the churlish are almost generous, having such overflowing pockets. There was no testimonial, no address on vellum, no purse with banker's draft for the enfeebled servant of Christ slumbering in the cane chair in the verandah.

Yet the house was exquisitely kept, marvellously kept considering the class of servants they were obliged to put up with. The garden was bright and beautiful with flowers, the lawn smooth, there was an air of refinement everywhere. So the clergyman slept, and the wife turned again to her sketch of the patent hive, hoping that the golden honey might at last bring some metallic gold. The waggon rumbled down the road, and Hodge, lying at full length on the top of the load, could just see over the lowest part of the shrubbery, and thought to himself what a jolly life that parson led, sleeping the hot hours away in the shade.

CHAPTER XV

A Modern Country Curate

‘HE can’t strodde thuck puddle, you; can a’?’

‘He be going to try: a’ will leave his shoe in it.’

Such were the remarks that passed between two agricultural women who from behind the hedge were watching the approach of the curate along a deep miry lane. Where they stood the meadow was high above the level of the lane, which was enclosed by steep banks thickly overgrown with bramble, briar, and thorn. The meadows each side naturally drained into the hollow, which during a storm was filled with a rushing torrent, and even after a period of dry weather was still moist, for the over-hanging trees prevented evaporation. A row of sarsen stones at irregular intervals were intended to afford firm footing to the wayfarer, but they were nothing more than traps for the unwary. Upon placing the foot on the smooth rounded surface it immediately slipped, and descended at an angle into a watery hole. The thick, stiff, yellow clay held the water like a basin; the ruts, quite two feet deep, where waggon wheels had been drawn through by main force, were full to the brim. In summer heats they might have dried, but in November, though fine, they never would.

Yet if the adventurous passenger, after gamely struggling, paused awhile to take breath, and looked up from the mud, the view above was beautiful. The sun shone, and lit up the oaks, whose every leaf was brown or buff; the gnats played in thousands in the mild air under the branches. Through the coloured leaves the blue sky was visible, and far ahead a faintly bluish shadow fell athwart the hollow. There were still blackberries on the bramble, beside which the brown fern filled the open spaces, and behind upon the banks the mosses clothed the ground and the roots of the trees with a deep green. Two or more fieldfares were watching in an elm some distance down; the flock to which they belonged was

feeding, partly in the meadow and partly in the hedge. Every now and then the larks flew over, uttering their call note. Behind a bunch of rushes a young rabbit crouched in the ditch on the earth thrown out from the hole hard by, doubtful in his mind whether to stay there or to enter the burrow.

It was so still and mild between the banks, where there was not the least current of air, that the curate grew quite warm with the exertion. His boots adhered to the clay, in which they sank at every step; they came out with a 'sock, sock'. He now followed the marks of footsteps, planting his step where the weight of some carter or shepherd had pressed the mud down firm. Where these failed he was attracted by a narrow grassgrown ridge, a few inches wide, between two sets of ruts. In a minute he felt the ridge giving beneath him as the earth slipped into the watery ruts. Next he crept along the very edge of the ditch, where the briars hooked in the tail of his black frock-coat, and an unnoticed projecting bough quietly lifted his shovel-hat off, but benevolently held it suspended, instead of dropping it in the mud. Still he made progress, though slow; now with a giant stride across an exceptionally doubtful spot, now zig-zagging from side to side. The lane was long, and he seemed to make but little advance.

But there was a spirit in him not to be stayed by mud, or clay, or any other obstacle. It is pleasant to see an enthusiast, whether right or wrong, in these cynical days. He was too young to have acquired much worldly wisdom, but he was full of the high spirit which arises from thorough conviction and the sense of personal consecration conferred by the mission on the man. He pushed on steadily till brought to a stop by a puddle, broad, deep, and impassable, which extended right across the lane, and was some six or eight yards long. He tried to slip past at the side, but the banks were thick with thorns, and the brambles overhung the water; the outer bushes coated with adhesive mud. Then he sounded the puddle with his stick as far as he could reach, and found it deep and the bottom soft, so that the foot would sink into it. He considered, and looked up and down the lane.

The two women, of whose presence he was unconscious, watched him from the high and dry level of the meadow, concealed behind the bushes and the oaks. They wore a species of smock frock gathered in round the waist by a band over their ordinary dress;

these smock frocks had once been white, but were now discoloured with dirt and the weather. They were both stout and stolid-looking, hardy as the trees under which they stood. They were acorn picking, searching for the dropped acorns in the long rank grass by the hedge, under the brown leaves, on the banks, and in the furrows. The boughs of the oak spread wide – the glory of the tree is in its head – and the acorns are found in a circle corresponding with the outer circumference of the branches. Some are still father afield, because in falling they strike the boughs and glance aside. A long slender pole leaning against the hedge was used to thrash the boughs within reach, and so to knock down any that remained.

A sack half filled was on the ground close to the trunk of the oak, and by it was a heap of dead sticks, to be presently carried home to boil the kettle. Two brown urchins assisted them, and went where the women could not go, crawling under the thorns into the hedge, and creeping along the side of the steep bank, gathering acorns that had fallen into the mouths of the rabbit holes, or that were lying under the stoles. Out of sight under the bushes they could do much as they liked, looking for fallen nuts instead of acorns, or eating a stray blackberry, while their mothers routed about among the grass and leaves of the meadow. Such continual stooping would be weary work for anyone not accustomed to it. As they worked from tree to tree they did not observe the colours of the leaves, or the wood-pigeons, or the pheasant looking along the edge of the ditch on the opposite side of the field. If they paused it was to gossip, or to abuse the boys for not bringing more acorns to the sack.

But when the boys, hunting in the hedge, descried the curate in the distance and came back with the news, the two women were suddenly interested. The pheasants, the wood-pigeons, or the coloured leaves were not worthy of a glance. To see a gentleman up to his ankles in mud was quite an attraction. The one stood with her lap half-full of acorns; the other with a basket on her arm. The two urchins lay down on the ground, and peered from behind a thorn stole, their brown faces scarcely distinguishable from the brown leaves, except for their twinkling eyes. The puddle was too wide to step across, as the women had said, nor was there any way round it.

The curate looked all round twice, but he was not the man to go back. He tucked up his trousers nearly to the knee – he wore them short always – and stepped into the water. At this the urchins could barely suppress a shout of delight – they did, however, suppress it – and craned forward to see him splash. The curate waded slowly to the middle, getting deeper and deeper, and then suddenly found firmer footing, and walked the rest of the way with the water barely over his boots. After he was through he cleansed his boots on a wisp of grass, and set off at a good pace, for the ground past the pool began to rise, and the lane was consequently drier. The women turned again to their acorns, remarking, in a tone with something like respect in it, ‘He didn’t stop for the mud, you: did a’?’

Presently the curate reached the highway with its hard surface, and again increased his pace. The hedges here were cut each side, and as he walked rapidly, leaned forward, his shovel-hat and shoulders were visible above them, and his coat tails floated in the breeze of his own progress. His heavy boots – they were extremely thick and heavy, though without nails – tramped, tramped, on the hard road. With a stout walking-stick in one hand, and in the other a book, he strode forward, still more swiftly as it seemed at every stride. A tall young man, his features seemed thin and almost haggard; out of correspondence with a large frame, they looked as if asceticism had drawn and sharpened them. There was earnestness and eagerness – almost feverish eagerness – in the expression of his face. He passed the meadows, the stubble fields, the green root crops, the men at plough, who noticed his swift walk, contrasting with their own slow motion; and as he went his way now and then consulted a little slip of paper, upon which he had jotted memoranda of his engagements. Work, work, work – ceaseless work. How came this? What could there be to do in a sparsely-populated agricultural district with, to appearance, hardly a cottage to a mile?

After nearly an hour’s walking he entered the outskirts of a little country town, slumbering outside the railway system, and, turning aside from the street, stopped at the door of the ancient vicarage. The resident within is the ecclesiastical head of two separate hamlets lying at some miles’ distance from his own parish. Each of these hamlets possesses a church, though the population is of

the very sparsest, and in each he maintains a resident curate. A third curate assists him in the duties of the home parish, which is a large one, that is in extent. From one of these distant hamlets the curate, who struggled so bravely through the mire, has walked in to consult the superior. He is shown into a chair to wait for the vicar, who is engaged with a district visitor, or lay sister.

This part of the house is ancient, and dates from medieval times. Some have conjectured that the present library and the adjoining rooms (the partitions being modern) originally formed the refectory of a monastic establishment. Others assign it to another use; but all agree that it is monastic and antique. The black oak rafters of the roof, polished as it were by age, meet overhead unconcealed by ceiling. Upon the wall in one place a figure seems at the first glance to be in the act to glide forth like a spectre from the solid stone. The effect is caused by the subdued colouring, which is shadowy and indistinct. It was perhaps gaudy when first painted; but when a painting has been hidden by a coat or two of plaster, afterwards as carefully removed as it was carelessly laid on, the tints lose their brilliancy. Some sainted woman in a flowing robe, with upraised arm, stands ever in the act to bless. Only half of one of the windows of the original hall is in this apartment – the partition wall divides it. There yet remain a few stained panes in the upper part; few as they are and small, yet the coloured light that enters through them seems to tone the room.

The furniture, of oak, is plain and spare to the verge of a gaunt severity, and there is not one single picture-frame on the wide expanse of wall. On the table are a few books and some letters, with foreign postmarks, and addressed in the crabbed handwriting of Continental scholars. Over the table a brazen lamp hangs suspended by a slender chain. In a corner are some fragments of stone mouldings and wood carvings like the panel of an ancient pew. There are no shelves and no bookcase. Besides those on the table, one volume lies on the floor, which is without carpet or covering, but absolutely clean; and by the wall, not far from the fireplace, is an open chest, ancient and ponderous, in which are the works of the Fathers. The grate has been removed from the fireplace and the hearth restored; for in that outlying district there is plenty of wood. Though of modern make, the heavy brass fire-irons are of ancient shape. The fire has gone out – the logs are white with the

ash that forms upon decaying embers; it is clear that the owner of this bare apartment, called a library, but really a study, is not one who thinks of his own personal comfort. If examined closely the floor yonder bears the marks of feet that have walked monotonously to and from in hours of thought. When the eye has taken in these things, as the rustle of the brown leaves blown against the pane without in the silence is plainly audible, the mind seems in an instant to slip back four hundred years.

The weary curate has closed his eyes, and starts as a servant enters bringing him wine, for the vicar, utterly oblivious of his own comfort, is ever on the watch for that of others. His predecessor, a portly man, happy in his home alone, and, as report said, loving his ease and his palate, before he was preferred to a richer living, called in the advice of architects as to converting the ancient refectory to some use. In this time it was a mere lumber-room, into which all the odds and ends of the house were thrown. Plans were accordingly prepared for turning one part of it into a cosy breakfast parlour, and the other into a conservatory. Before any steps, however, were taken he received his preferment – good things flow to the rich – and departed leaving behind him a favourable memory. If any inhabitant were asked what the old vicar did, or said, and what work he accomplished the reply invariably was, ‘Oh! hum! he was a very good sort of man: he never interfered with anybody or anything!’

Accustomed to such an even tenour of things, all the *vis inertiae* of the parish revolted when the new vicar immediately evinced a determination to do his work thoroughly. The restless energy of the man alone set the stolid old folk at once against him. They could not ‘a-bear to see he a-flying all over the parish: why couldn’t he bide at home?’ No one is so rigidly opposed to the least alteration in the conduct of the service as the old farmer or farmer’s wife, who for forty years and more has listened to the same old hymn, the same sing-song response, the same style of sermon. It is vain to say that the change is still no more than what was contemplated by the Book of Common Prayer. They have naturally interpreted that book by what they have been accustomed to from childhood. The vicar’s innovations were really most in-offensive, and well within even a narrow reading of the rubric. The fault lay in the fact that they were innovations, so far as the practice

of that parish was concerned. So the old folk raised their voices in a chorus of horror, and when they met gossiped over the awful downfall of the faith. All that the vicar had yet done was to intone a part of the service, and at once many announced that they should stay away.

Next he introduced a choir. The sweet voices of the white-robed boys rising along the vaulted roof of the old church melted the hearts of those who, with excuses for their curiosity to their neighbours, ventured to go and hear them. The vicar had a natural talent, almost a genius, for music. There was a long struggle in his mind whether he might or might not permit himself an organ in his library. He decided it against himself, mortifying the spirit as well as the flesh, but in the service of the Church he felt that he might yield to his inclination. By degrees he gathered round him the best voices of the parish; the young of both sexes came gladly after awhile to swell the volume of song. How powerful is the influence of holy music upon such minds as are at all inclined to serious devotion! The church filled more and more every Sunday, and people came from the farthest corners of the parish, walking miles to listen. The young people grew enthusiastic, and one by one the old folk yielded and followed them.

At the same time the church itself seemed to change. It had been cold and gloomy, and gaunt within, for so many generations, that no one noticed it. A place of tombs, men hurried away from it as quickly as possible. Now, little touches here and there gradually gave it the aspect of habitation. The new curtains hung at the door of the vestry, and drawn, too, across the main entrance when service began, the fleur-de-lys on the crimson ground, gave an impression of warmth. The old tarnished brazen fittings of the pews were burnished up, a new and larger stove (supplied at the vicar's expense) diffused at least some little heat in winter. A curate came, one who worked heart and soul with the vicar, and the service became very nearly choral, the vicar now wearing the vestment which his degree gave him the strict right to assume. There were brazen candlesticks behind the altar, and beautiful flowers. Before, the interior was all black and white. Now there was a sense of colour, of crimson curtains, of polished brass, of flowers, and rich toned altar cloth. The place was lit up with a new light. After the first revolt of the old folk there was little opposition, because

the vicar, being a man who had studied human nature and full of practical wisdom as well as learning, did all things gradually. One thing was introduced at a time, and the transition – after the first start – was effected imperceptibly. Nor was any extravagant ritual thrust upon the congregation; nor any suspicious doctrine broached.

In that outlying country place, where men had no knowledge of cathedrals, half the offices of the Church had been forgotten. The vicar brought them back again. He began early morning services; he had the church open all day for private prayer. He reminded the folk of Lent and Eastertide, which, except for the traditional pancakes, had almost passed out of their lives. Festivals, saints' days, midnight service, and above all the Communion, were insisted upon and brought home to them. As in many other country districts, the Communion had nearly dropped into disuse. At first he was alone, but by and by a group of willing lay helpers grew up around him. The churchwardens began to work with him; then a few of the larger tenant farmers. Of the two great landed proprietors, one was for him from the first, the other made no active opposition, but stood aloof. When, in the autumn, the family of the one that was for him came home, a fresh impetus was given. The ladies of the mansion came forward to join in the parish and Church work, and then other ladies, less exalted, but fairly well-to-do, who had only been waiting for a leader, crowded after.

For the first time in the memory of man the parish began to be 'visited'. Lay sisters accepted the charge of districts; and thus there was not a cottage, nor an old woman, but had the change brought home to her. Confirmation, which had been almost forgotten, was revived, and it was surprising what a number of girls came forward to be prepared. The Bishop, who was not at all predisposed to view the 'movement' with favour, when he saw the full church, the devotional congregation, and after he had visited the vicarage, and seen into what was going on personally, expressed openly a guarded approval, and went away secretly well pleased. Rightly or wrongly, there was a 'movement' in the parish and the outlying hamlets; and thus it was that the curate, struggling through the mire, carried in his face the expression of hard work. Work, work, work; the vicar, his three curates, and band of lay helpers worked incessantly.

Besides his strictly parochial duties, the vicar wrote a manual for use in the schools, he attended the Chambers of Agriculture, and supported certain social movements among the farmers, he attended meetings, and, both socially and politically, by force of character, energy, and the gift of speech, became a power in the country side. Still striving onwards, he wrote in London periodicals, he published a book; he looked from the silence of his gaunt study towards the great world, and sometimes dreamed of what he might have done had he not been buried in the country, and of what he might even yet accomplish. All who came in contact with him felt the influence of his concentrated purpose; one and all, after they had worked their hardest, thought they had still not done so much as he would have done.

The man's charm of manner was not to be resisted; he believed his office far above monarchs, but there was no personal pretension. That gentle, pleasing manner, with the sense of intellectual power behind it, quite overcame the old folk. They all spoke with complacent pride of 'our vicar'; and, what was more, opened their purses. The interior of the church was restored, and a noble organ built. When its beautiful notes rose and fell, when sweet voices swelled the wave of sound, then even the vicar's restless spirit was soothed in the fulfilment of his hope. A large proportion of the upper and middle-class of the parish was, without a doubt, now gathered around him; and there was much sympathy manifested from adjacent parishes with his objects, sympathy which often took the form of subscriptions from distant people.

But what said Hodge to it all? Hodge said nothing. Some few young cottage people who had good voices, and liked to use them, naturally now went to church. So did the old women and old men, who had an eye to charity. But the strong, sturdy men, the carters and shepherds stood aloof; the bulk and backbone of the agricultural labouring population were not in the least affected. They viewed the movement with utter indifference. They cleaned their boots on a Sunday morning while the bells were ringing, and walked down to their allotments, and came home and ate their cabbage, and were as oblivious of the vicar as the wind that blew. They had no present quarrel with the Church; no complaint whatever; nor apparently any old memory or grudge; yet there was something, a blank space as it were, between them and the

Church. If anything, the 'movement' rather set them against going.

Agricultural cottagers have a strong bias towards Dissent in one form or another; village chapels are always well filled. Dissent, of course, would naturally rather dislike a movement of that kind. But there was no active or even passive opposition. The cottage folk just ignored the Church; nothing more and nothing less. No efforts were spared to obtain their good will and to draw them into the fold, but there was absolutely no response. Not a labourer's family in that wide district was left unvisited. The cottages were scattered far apart, dotted here and there, one or two down in a narrow coombe surrounded on three sides by the green wall of the hills. Others stood on the bleak plains, unsheltered by tree or hedge, exposed to the keen winds that swept across the level, yet elevated fields. A new cottage built in modern style, with glaring red brick, was perched on the side of a hill, where it was visible miles away. An old thatched one stood in a hollow quite alone, half a mile from the highway, and so hidden by the oaks that an army might have ravaged the country and never found it. How many, many miles of weary walking such rounds as these required!

Though they had, perhaps, never received a 'visitor' before, it was wonderful with what skill the cottage women especially – the men being often away at work – adapted themselves to the new *régime*. Each time they told a more pitiful tale, set in such a realistic framing of hardship and exposure that a stranger could not choose but believe. In the art of encouraging attentions of this sort no one excels the village women; the stories they will relate, with the smallest details inserted in the right place, are something marvellous. At first you would exclaim with the deepest commiseration, such a case of suffering and privation as this cannot possibly be equalled by any in the parish; but calling at the next cottage, you are presented with a yet more moving relation, till you find the whole population are plunged in misery and afflicted with incredible troubles. They cannot, surely, be the same folk that work so sturdily at harvest. But when the curate has administered words of consolation and dropped the small silver dole in the palm, when his shovel-hat and black frockcoat tails have disappeared round the corner of the copse, then in a single second he drops

utterly out of mind. No one comes to church the more. If inquiries are made why they did not come, a hundred excuses are ready; the rain, a bad foot, illness of the infant, a cow taken ill and requiring attention, and so on.

After some months of such experience the curate's spirits gradually decline; his belief in human nature is sadly shaken. Men who openly oppose, who argue and deny, are comparatively easy to deal with; there is the excitement of the battle with evil. But a population that listens, and apparently accepts the message, that is so thankful for little charities, and always civil, and yet turns away utterly indifferent, what is to be done with it? Might not the message nearly as well be taken to the cow at her crib, or the horse at his manger? They, too, would receive a wisp of sweet hay willingly from the hand.

But the more bitter the experience, the harder the trial, the more conscientiously the curate proceeds upon his duty, struggling bravely through the mire. He adds another mile to his daily journey; he denies himself some further innocent recreation. The cottages in the open fields are comparatively pleasant to visit, the sweet fresh air carries away effluvia. Those that are so curiously crowded together in the village are sinks of foul smell, and may be of worse – places where, if fever comes, it takes hold and quits not. His superior requests him earnestly to refrain awhile and to take rest, to recruit himself with a holiday – even orders him to desist from overmuch labour. The man's mind is in it, and he cannot obey. What is the result?

Some lovely autumn day, at a watering-place, you may perchance be strolling by the sea, with crowds of well-dressed, happy people on the one side, and on the other the calm sunlit plain where boats are passing to and fro. A bath-chair approaches, and a young man gets out of it, where some friendly iron railings afford him a support for his hand. There, step by step, leaning heavily on the rails, he essays to walk as a child. The sockets of his joints yield beneath him, the limbs are loose, the ankle twists aside; each step is an enterprise, and to gain a yard a task. Thus day by day the convalescent strives to accustom the sinews to their work. It is a painful spectacle; how different, how strangely altered, from the upright frame and the swift stride that struggled through the miry lane, perhaps even then bearing the seeds

of disease imbibed in some foul village den, where duty called him!

His wan, white face seems featureless; there is nothing but a pair of deep-set eyes. But as you pass, and momentarily catch their glance, they are bright and burning still with living faith.

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